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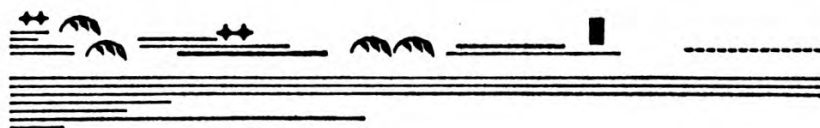
THE SEA-GULL CRY

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The Sea-Gull Cry

BY

ROBERT NATHAN



ALFRED A. KNOPF

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*“ . . . but in the second's pause
Between the assaulting and the broken wave,
The voices of the lovers can be heard,
The sea-gull cry.”*

from JOHN BROWN'S BODY

by Stephen Vincent Benét

With the exception of a few of my Cape Cod friends, who may find themselves mentioned with affection, all characters are fictional and imaginary, and do not portray and are not intended to portray any actual persons.

THE SEA-GULL CRY

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CHAPTER

1

The scow lay tilted a little against the bank, near the mouth of the river. At high tide the water pressed gently against the worn planks of the hull, which would have sunk long ago if it had not been resting on the sand. The early spring sun shone down on the scow's little cabin, which was painted white, and had curtains at the windows; the gulls flew over it, and the terns rose with melancholy

cries from the stream into which they had hurled themselves in search of food.

Salt grass grew along the bank, the tide poured in, green and cold, over the yellow sand. Beyond the river was the bay; the wind blew in from the bay, it made waves in the silver grass, it crossed the narrow land and found itself at the sea which was already blue as a morning-glory.

It was eight o'clock. The door of the cabin opened, and a small boy stepped out into the sunshine on the deck. His hair was the color of straw, and as untidy. "Louisa," he called; "it is a beautiful day. I should like my breakfast."

He spoke with a faint accent; the woman's light voice which answered him was like his own. "I am coming, Jeri," she said. "Do you build a fire meanwhile."

“The tide has wet our fireplace,” said Jeri.
“We have no wood.”

“Then we will wait for later,” said Louisa,
“and eat our lunch.”

She stepped out onto the deck beside him, a tall, fair girl, with brown eyes like amber in the sun. They were brother and sister; he was seven, and she was nineteen. Their feet were bare, and they were dressed in faded, blue overalls.

She lifted her arms, and took a deep breath of the fresh, salt air. “It is another fine day,” she said. “We are very lucky, Jeri.”

“Yes,” he said. “But I would like my breakfast now.”

“Will a banana do,” she asked, “with milk?”

“I do like bacon very much,” he said.

“There is no fire, Jeri.”

“ Well,” he said, “ perhaps if I went to look in the grass, I might find a little wood.”

“ Do that,” she said; “ and perhaps today Mr. Baghot will come and bring us the stove.”

While the boy scrambled up the bank to look for wood, she slipped out of her overalls, and waded into the water. The nearest house was half a mile off, and still winter-empty; there was no one anywhere to see her. Tiny hermit crabs scuttled away from under her feet; the water was cold, and flowing strongly. She swam a few strokes, and came out again, shivering into the sun. Dear God, she thought, let us be happy like this for a little longer; and also let Mr. Baghot not forget to bring the stove.

She cooked her brother's breakfast and her own on a driftwood fire behind the scow, well above the high water; and then she went in to tidy up

the cabin. This small, oblong shanty consisted of two tiny rooms, each big enough to hold a pair of narrow bunks attached to the wall, which was of plain planking worn dark with age. Jeri and Louisa slept in front; the back room had a place for the stove which Mr. Baghot had promised to bring them. When it was in, the little back room would serve them as dining room, kitchen, and parlor, all combined. There was just enough room in it to sit down; they could cook on the stove, and it would keep them warm.

They had paid ten dollars for the right to live there all summer. It seemed like simple providence to Mrs. Baghot, who owned it, for no one else had ever paid to live in it before; she couldn't see but what they would have been better off in a room in the village. But ten dollars was all they could afford.

It was part of what the refugee relief committee had given them a month before, in the city. Spring was just beginning then, the skies were far-away blue, and the grass was green in the Park. Near the Mall, the cherry trees were starting to blossom. But Louisa had made up her mind to leave the city while she still had a little money to get her somewhere else. "I think we will not stay here any more," she said to Jeri; "summer is coming, with heat; it will be sad here, and I will not be able to find any work. We will go to the country. We will go somewhere by the sea, and catch fish."

"Good," said Jeri. "I will be a brave fisherman. Perhaps I will be a hunter, like the men at home."

"Hush," said Louisa.

"Yes," he said, "I am sorry; I did not think."

"This is our home now, Jeri," she said.

And she added,

“ We will go to New England, it has the best sound.”

So it happened that Mr. Alfred Baghot, part owner of the trawler Emily, found them walking on the road between Fall River and Taunton. Louisa was carrying a valise, and Jeri had a bundle slung over his shoulder. Mr. Baghot stopped his car beside them, and opened the door. “ You folks going far? ” he asked.

“ We are looking to find the sea,” said Louisa.

Mr. Baghot scratched his head. “ Where do you aim to strike it? ” he asked. She put down her bag, and looked at him helplessly. “ I do not know,” she said. “ Is it far? ”

“ Well,” he said, “ it’s a piece. You got any particular place in view? ”

“ No,” she said.

“Then get in,” he said. “I’ll take you to where you can see it.”

They crowded into the car, with the valise and the bundle in which they had packed all their belongings. “We are going to be fishermen,” Jeri explained. “So we will always have enough to eat.”

“By God, I doubt it,” said Mr. Baghot. “Where I come from, fishing don’t hardly make a living.”

“And where is that?” asked Louisa politely.

“Truro, on Cape Cod,” said Mr. Baghot.

“Is it lovely there?”

“Couldn’t say,” replied Mr. Baghot. “It suits me all right.

“Lived there all my life,” he added, “and my folks before me, and their folks before them.”

“We will go to Truro,” said Louisa.

So Louisa and Jeri came to Truro, and rented the old scow from Mr. Baghot's wife, Sarah. They had been there for nearly a week; fortunately, the weather was fine, but it was still early in the season, and they had been very cold. But the cold came only at night, and then Jeri crept in beside Louisa, and they warmed each other.

They were lonely, but they were used to loneliness, and they had each other. The second day, Jeri caught a flounder off the bay shore, on a line given him by Mr. Baghot. They ate it for supper, and Jeri thought that nothing had ever tasted better, although part of it was burned from falling in the fire.

But the next day he caught a skate, which frightened him. "I did not exactly cry," he said to Louisa afterwards, "but I was very glad when he was dead."



“And your fishing hook and line?” asked Louisa, raising her eyebrows.

“I will go back and get them some day when he is very dead,” said Jeri.

In the morning, while he explored the rocks at the river's mouth, or gathered wood along the shore, she busied herself with household tasks, aired the blankets and mattresses, scrubbed the worn planking with sand and water, and mended their simple clothes. In the afternoon they went out together in the dory which Mrs. Baghot had loaned them. It was old, and heavy, and hard to manage, and the water came quietly in through the bottom. Jeri took one oar, and Louisa the other; they kept to the slow-flowing currents along the bank, pulling against the river which swept past them bearing on its surface seaweed and disks of brown foam. Inland, in the direction of

the sea, beach plum and shad bush were white, and the little hills and downs rose from the shore, still lichen-gray and winter-silver, topped with rusty pines no higher than lilac bushes. It was a bare land, and in the gentle spring sunshine, innocent and fresh; and Louisa loved it.

Beyond the river mouth lay the bay, and across the bay lay Provincetown, misty in the sea light, with the trap boats, back from the nets, drawn up to their moorings, and the draggers and the seiners putting out. "Some day we will go there, Jeri," said Louisa. "We will ask Mr. Baghot to take us in his boat."

"I will like that," said Jeri. "I will stand up in the front, and steer."

His oar slipped, and sent a shower of spray into the air. "It is very far away," he said. "It will be a long journey."

"It will take about an hour," said Louisa.

"That is what I meant," he said.

She turned around and looked at him. The sun had already brought a little color into his face, and to his thin, childish arms; but his ribs still showed white as he strained at the oar. If only I have done the right thing to come here, she thought.

She was alone; there was no one to ask, or tell her. She started to think of her father; her eyes clouded, and she looked stonily out across the water until her sight cleared. Her father lay dead, on the battlefields of Europe; her mother was buried in the ruins of her house. It was over, it was finished: she must not think about them any more.

CHAPTER

2

Mr. Baghot brought the stove that afternoon, rowing down with the tide from the town landing further up the river. He got the stove out onto the sand, and then carried it to the scow; it was small, but heavy, and Jeri watched him with admiration. "You are very strong," he said. "You are almost as strong as some men I know at home."

"I was brought up strong," said Mr. Baghot, breathing heavily. And he added,

“ It’s wholly easy, once you get the hang of it.”

When he had the stove set in place, he came outside, and sat down on the deck. “ I never knew a spring come earlier than this one,” he said, mopping his face.

The late afternoon sun, slanting across the water, shone in their eyes; the wind had turned east, and there was a faint land breeze, sweet with broom and pine. The water chuckled in the river, hissing a little in the sand at their feet. “ There’s a lot of bass this year,” he said. “ They’re feeding close to shore. George Glover got three last week, right off Cornhill.”

He was silent for a moment, thinking. “ It doesn’t seem like winter’s had time to be rightly over,” he said. “ Seems to me it went by the fastest I’ve ever known.” His face had a look of surprise. “ By God,” he said, “ time’s getting shorter.”

That cannot be true, she thought. This endless year, so crowded with history . . . was there ever room in it for all that happened? To me, and to the world. . . .

"I figure to go out one of these nights after bass," said Mr. Baghot.

. . . Was there ever time to make such changes, to come so far . . .

"Excuse me," she said. "I was not listening."

"I said I was figuring to go out after bass," said Mr. Baghot. With a sigh, he rose to go. "If you want for anything, just let me know," he said.

And he added, as he stepped into the boat,

"Summer has always vexed me."

They watched him row back up the stream, hugging the bank to keep out of the current.

"You did not ask him if he would take us riding in his boat," said Jeri sadly.



“ I forgot,” Louisa admitted. “ But there is all the long summer ahead.”

“ He said the time is getting shorter,” said Jeri.

“ He is an old man of fifty,” said Louisa. “ It is not getting shorter for you and me.”

Mr. Baghot went back to his house. Like all the old houses of Truro, it was small and tidy, tucked in a hollow out of the wind. The biggest room was the kitchen, and there Mrs. Baghot spent most of her days. She was in the kitchen now, when Mr. Baghot got home. “ That you, Alfred? ” she called. “ I been wondering where you were.”

“ Took the stove down to those folks on the scow,” said Mr. Baghot, hanging up his hat. “ I guess they’ll be warm enough now.”

He sat down in the faded rocker, and reached for his pipe, and for the evening paper. “ You

never did ask them where they come from, Sarah," he said.

"No," she agreed, coming to the door. "I never thought to ask."

She went back into the kitchen, leaving Mr. Baghot to rock up and down by himself, the paper open on his knee. "Mackerel's at six cents," he remarked presently. "Be eight soon."

"That's good," said Mrs. Baghot.

"What we got for supper, Sarah? "

"Chowder and apple pie."

He opened the paper to an inside page. "We've got trouble in the army," he declared. "'Morale Low in Army Camps' it says. 'Slain Woman's Love Mate Found.'"

"We staying home tonight? "

"Why? "

"I thought that maybe me and George Glover

would go down to the river after some bass."

"Lord above," said Mrs. Baghot. "Well, suit yourself."

He folded the paper and put it away. "There's too much goes on," he said. "There's too much for one man to do."

"Come eat your supper," said Mrs. Baghot.

They sat in the warm kitchen, with the low sun yellow in the west windows. She filled his plate with chowder, and passed it to him. "Put plenty of potatoes in," he said. "They sort of hold things down."

For a while they ate in silence. "Those young folks at the scow," she said finally; "you think they got any money, Alfred?"

"Don't know," he said.

"It's a funny thing, you finding them the way you did."

“ Yes,” he said. “ I just stopped the car, and told them ‘ Get in.’ ”

She shook her head in quiet wonder. “ We’d ought to have painted the scow, Alfred,” she remarked.

“ You mean I’d ought to have painted it,” said Mr. Baghot. “ Well, it would be out of place.”

He took a big bite of pie, and washed it down with coffee. “ Cost me a dollar eighty-five,” he said, “ to get the stove fixed.”

Mrs. Baghot sighed. She had figured on the ten dollars for pin money through the summer: two-fifty every month, sixty cents a week, to do as she pleased with. It had cost her fifty cents to have the two old blankets washed.

Still, she had only done her Christian duty to people in distress. If they really were in distress,

that is. "She has a pretty face," said Mrs. Baghot. "They both have nice ways."

"I don't grudge them the stove," said Mr. Baghot. He got up, and pushed his chair back from the table. "I'm going down to George's now," he said. "I'll take this slice of pie along with me, to eat later."

The dusty cloud of night rolled up in the east, above the sea; the sunset deepened across the bay where the lonely lights of Provincetown trembled in the dusk. The sunset colors died, the evening star hung silver in the west, clear and still in the green sky. In the scow a single lamp gave out a shadowy light as Louisa and Jeri ate their supper of milk, cheese, and crackers. "Tomorrow we will go and buy a little meat," she said.

"I would greatly like a sausage," said Jeri. "But perhaps tomorrow I will catch another fish."

“You must have patience to catch a fish,” said Louisa. “I am also thinking of a sausage.”

“It’s a long while now, since I caught the flounder.”

“Some day you will catch another,” said Louisa.

She put a few pieces of wood on the stove, to warm the room. “It is time to go to bed, little brother,” she said. “This time you can undress, because we have a fire.”

“I like it here, with the fire,” he said. “I will like going to sleep tonight.”

“Do not forget to say your prayers,” she reminded him.

He folded his hands, over the blanket. “Our Father who art in heaven,” he began, “Hallowed be Thy Name . . .”

When he had finished, he added,

“God bless our father and mother in heaven,
and Louisa, and Jeri, and Mr. and Mrs. Baghot.
And . . . everybody I know . . .

“And Blessed Saint Casimir guard my soul.
Amen.”

“Amen,” said Louisa.

The tide flowed by outside, the stars spread
across the sky. A bittern boomed from the inland
marshes, a fish jumped in the river; and a solitary
gull, circling above the shanty, alighted for a mo-
ment beside a small paper parcel containing a
slice of pie, which someone had left before the
shanty door.

CHAPTER

3

Instructor Richard Smith stood before his class in modern history at the State Teachers College at Hyannis. "Too much history is being made," he said; "too much, and too fast. I have no idea what will happen before we meet again; the end of the world, perhaps, or something equally final.

"I shall see some of you, I hope, in the fall. Meanwhile, I wish you all a pleasant summer.

“The class is dismissed.”

It was the last class of the year. The students applauded mildly, and went out; and Mr. Smith picked up his books, and followed them.

He was no longer young enough to be happy because the year was over. He knew himself to be middle-aged, and it seemed to him that time was moving too rapidly for him to keep up with it. Already, he thought, the battle of the Marne, and the treaties of Versailles and Locarno belong to the distant past, along with Fontenoy, and the peace of Utrecht; and the world is in the soup.

It seemed to him that there was nothing that he could do about it.

Mr. Smith often said to the students in his class: “History is the story of successful men and nations.” And he would point out that there was no history of Erech, Akkad, Parthia, Carthage, or the

Chinese Generals who opposed Genghis Khan, although they were known to have existed. Then he would add, "Our own men and women who followed the covered wagons to the west, took their historians along. If they had all died in the desert, no one would have heard about them."

Such remarks as these made no impression on his students, who did not expect to have anything to do with history, except in a book. They were too young, life was too new; what had they to do with Hannibal? The moon that rose over the slow-breathing water was theirs alone, to look at, or to sing to; another moon had washed the towers of Troy.

They are like young birds, Mr. Smith thought; nothing has ever happened to them. And when it does, they will think that it never happened to anyone before.

He added sadly, I am no better off than they. In the midst of the most furious action in history, I can only discuss the structure of countries which have already ceased to exist.

Mr. Smith had only one wish — to run away from youth and history both, from the disasters he could not oppose, and the young people who were indifferent to them. He longed to be free of all the sadness which was piling up in the world, and which made his heart grow heavier each day when he read the morning newspapers. And so, now that summer stretched before him — a summer in which there seemed to be nothing to do but wait for news of the great battles across the sea — he made up his mind to do something he had never done before: he made up his mind to buy a boat.

He saw himself sailing along the coast, putting

in at night at some quiet bay or village, the infinite stars above him, the day-long winds blowing him along the empty roads of the sea. There, the only news of any importance would be the weather, and the tides.

It was a week before the close of college, that he found the advertisement in the paper: "For Sale: twenty-four foot center-board sloop, *Thetis*; cabin, gaff rig, conveniences, cheap, cash only." The sloop was to be seen at Harwichport, and Mr. Smith went to see it.

The *Thetis* was just what he wanted. She was old, but her build was substantial; the patched sails suggested that she had weathered winds, there was a fresh coat of paint, and the conveniences consisted of a life preserver, a small galley, and a cubby hole forward of the cabin, in which was a seat and a pump. The price was reasonable, though

it took most of Mr. Smith's savings. Still, he thought, I am buying a home for myself, in a manner of speaking. And spreading his maps and his charts on the table before him, he began to think of where he would go in his boat.

He was not a practised sailor, and knew very little about navigation, or about the waters whose charts he had procured from the office of the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey. In order to avoid the summer-chiffon shores of Long Island and Connecticut, he decided to follow the coast to the north, staying always, as he thought, in sight of land, except for the run across Massachusetts Bay between Provincetown and Scituate, which he expected to do by taking aim with the compass.

No one told him of the dangers to be found along the back shore of the Cape, both shoal and current; not knowing how easy it would be to

drown in an east wind between Pleasant Bay and Cahoon's Hollow, Mr. Smith set out in the *Thetis* on a Thursday, five days after college closed, with a light heart, with warm clothes, a book on navigation, charts of the coast as far east as Northport, Maine, and enough food for several weeks.

The wind was southwest at fifteen miles, and the *Thetis* bowled along, yawing a little in the swells. Mr. Smith stretched himself out on the bench beside the tiller, and watched the tall mast and the round, full sail bending and dipping against the clear blue sky. He was very happy, except for a slight seasickness due to the motion.

Toward evening he came to Nausset Harbor, and since no one told him not to go in, he did so, running aground almost at once on a sand bar. The tide was at ebb, and the wind had fortunately died; he managed to lower his sail without dam-

age, and after preparing a light meal for himself, and setting his riding light as he had been told to do, went to bed in the murmuring emptiness of ocean, unaware of the fact that he had forgotten to put his anchor out.

He slept; the tide came in, and the *Thetis* floated from the bar, only to ground again in the darkness on another, a few feet away. There she stayed until the tide went out, carrying her along with it. Little by little the black night faded in the air, the stars paled, and Mr. Smith came out on deck in the gray, frosty dawn, to find himself at sea.

It surprised him, and he let out a low whistle. "Look here," he said to himself; "something has been going on." And in a thoughtful mood, he hoisted his sail, and headed north once more, watching the early light slanting along the shore,



and the first rays of the sun sparkling on the waves.

The day was fine, the wind blew fresh and fair, and Mr. Smith saw the high white clouds of early summer gather above the horizon, and blue shadows run across the sea. He heard the low hiss and roll of water, the creak of the mast; otherwise all was still around him. Now I am truly alone, he thought; now I am free. For loneliness is a condition of freedom; the moment one has neighbors, the neighbors' troubles are there on the door step. It does not matter whether they are good neighbors or bad; the sound of laughter or of crying will be in the breeze. That is why our forefathers went west, to get away from other people's pains, as well as to find gold, and plant wheat. For this one summer I shall be by myself, I shall go where I please, and no one will be able to remind me that

the world is growing more uncomfortable every minute.

With the wind in the right quarter, the *Thetis* made brisk work of it, and by mid-afternoon was well off Highland Light. Studying his charts, Mr. Smith decided that he should be rounding the Cape by dusk, and be safely in Provincetown harbor by dark.

I must remember to put my anchor overboard, or at least tie up to something, he reflected.

The shadow of night rose behind him in the east, the gentle, blue light of evening began to cover the sea, and Mr. Smith found himself, as he had expected, rounding the Cape, about two miles from Wood End Light. All at once, it seemed to him that the wind faltered, and he looked up at his sail in surprise; a moment later, it fluttered, luffed, and then slatted about, the heavy boom

just missing his head. At the same time, a chill struck through the air.

Now the wind was blowing from the north, instead of from the south. The first, sudden gust was followed by another, harder one, which sent the *Thetis* over onto her side. And as he fumbled with the sheet, to let out sail, a capful of green, icy water splashed across his knees. I shall have to reef her down, he thought, and swung his weight against the tiller, to bring the vessel into the wind.

But before he could more than loose the hal-yard, she swung off again, with her sail sagging; while the canvas, bellying out, all but dragged him overboard. In dismay, he realized that he would have to let the sail go altogether, or else lose it; that there was nothing to do, in fact, but to run before the wind, under his jib. He supposed it would drive him ashore, but he hoped for

the best, and in any event he saw no help for it.

The air was cold; far off along the low smudge of coast, the lighthouses flashed their warnings, stabbing the dusk with yellow beams of light. The wind blew harder and harder, booming down from the north, striking down from the cold, green cloudy sky. On land, the little houses huddled in their hollows, warm and snug, while out on the water the *Thetis* scudded through the murk, her jib ballooning out ahead of her, skittering down the waves like a seabird.

Night was already black, and the waves breaking high on the Truro shore, when she struck.

CHAPTER

4

“ We have a wreck on our beach,” said Jeri, hurrying into the cabin. “ Come and see.”

His sister clapped her hands; she imagined a large steamer broken to pieces in the sand, and her eyes sparkled. “ Is it a great ship? ” she asked.

Jeri shook his head. “ No,” he announced. “ It is a little boat. But it is a splendid wreck, Louisa.”

“ Well,” she said hopefully, “ perhaps there will be some wood for the stove.”

“ There is no wood,” he said. “ The man was not drowned. He is alive, and very angry.”

“ Should we not rescue him, then? ”

“ From what? ” asked Jeri. “ He is sitting in the sand.”

“ Of what age is he? ” she asked.

“ He is an old man,” said Jeri.

She sighed. “ We will rescue him anyway,” she said.

Carrying a pot of coffee, and with a tin cup, a loaf of bread, and a blanket from their small store packed into the dory, they rowed down to the river mouth, from where they could see the *Thetis*, high and dry on the sand a hundred yards up the beach. Mr. Smith was seated in the sun alongside, thinking things over.

“ We have come to help you,” said Louisa, approaching with the coffee pot. “ Have you had a wreck? ”

Mr. Smith did not wish to be rude; on the other hand, he was very much vexed at the way things had turned out, and he replied in an angry voice:

“ What do you think? ”

“ You see? ” said Jeri to Louisa.

Louisa shook her head at him. “ It is not at all what you told me,” she declared accusingly. “ It is not a splendid wreck, but only a little one, and the man is not yet old.”

“ He looks yet old to me,” said Jeri.

Mr. Smith glanced up at him for a moment, and then looked away. “ Do not mind my brother,” said Louisa. “ We will help you in any case.”



“ You cannot help me,” said Mr. Smith.

“ But we have brought it,” exclaimed Louisa.

“ It is here.”

“ What have you brought? ” asked Mr. Smith wearily. “ What is here? ”

“ A blanket,” said Louisa, “ and something to eat.”

“ I am not hungry,” said Mr. Smith. “ And I do not need a blanket. I need a large housing jack, some two-by-fours, planks, a plane, a saw, and a hammer.”

“ Ah,” said Louisa regretfully; “ I do not have them.”

“ No,” said Mr. Smith.

“ I am very sorry,” she declared.

As Mr. Smith did not seem to have anything further to say, she added doubtfully, “ Since you



do not wish any of this good food, we will eat it ourselves.”

Spreading the blanket on the sand, and pouring herself some coffee from the pot, she sat down and bit happily into the loaf of bread.

“It was very windy last night,” she remarked.
“Very. It was cold also.

“Do you not think so?”

“Yes,” said Mr. Smith.

“It is so quiet here in Truro,” said Louisa. “It is an agreeable place in which to live. We fish, we swim, and we collect wood for our fire. When I heard that there was a wreck, I thought that I would get some wood.”

She sighed. “I can see that you do not have any,” she said; and smiled as though to say, Never mind, it does not matter.

“ No,” said Mr. Smith. “ No wood.”

“ Perhaps there is some rope? ” asked Louisa hopefully, “ or a small anchor for the dory? ”

“ No rope,” said Mr. Smith. “ Nothing.”

“ Well, I am sorry,” said Louisa. And she took another mouthful of bread.

From the other side of the *Thetis*, as she lay screened on the sand, Jeri appeared, his face alight with pleasure. “ There is a big hole over here,” he declared. “ I can see inside.”

And he added happily,

“ It is a very sad sight.”

Mr. Smith got up, and walked away down the beach. There were dead squid along the shore, like small red bombs, and in one place the sand was silver with tiny herring. Mr. Smith kicked at them moodily as he passed. What a dismal coast, he thought, to be wrecked on.

It did not help him any to reflect that if he had been a better sailor, he might have saved his boat. If he had only thought to let the jib sheet go before he struck — if he had gotten his anchor out in time, instead of waiting until it was too late —

“Damn,” he said. “I shall be here forever.”

What he meant was that it would take several days to repair the hole in the boat, and to patch the jib which had ripped loose from the halyard. There was water and sand in the cabin; he would have to clear it out. He would have to build a cradle, and get the boat up onto it; he needed wood, and tools, rollers, rope, pulleys, paint . . .

And a young woman with yellow hair had offered him a blanket.

There is altogether too much nonsense in the world, he thought.

Not until he was several hundred yards up the

beach did it occur to him that she might at least know of someone who could lend him the necessary tackle. Then he turned, and hurried back.

“Look,” he said; “You can help me after all, if you want to.”

Louisa was still sitting where he had left her. She was munching her bread, and watching Jeri, who had climbed onto the *Thetis* and was tugging at the tiller with seamanlike cries. “Ready men,” he shouted; and then: “Look out.

“There is a storm coming,” he announced.

Dropping the tiller, he ran up and down the deck, touching everything, patting the ropes and the rigging. “I am a very good captain,” he said.

“I don’t believe that he is doing the boat any good,” said Mr. Smith uncomfortably.

Louisa’s eyes were wide and brown as she looked up at him. “I do not think he hurts the

boat," she said, " weighing so little; but I will take him away from there."

And calling to Jeri, she motioned him down from the deck. He came slowly over the side, and dropped in the sand before her. " I was only playing," he said. " I was not harming the boat."

Mr. Smith gave them a long look, for he realized that he had not really seen them before. " You are not Americans, are you? " he asked.

" No, we are not," said Louisa. " Are you? "

" Of course," said Mr. Smith.

" Ah," said Louisa, " you are lucky. I shall be an American too, some day." She counted on her fingers. " In four years," she said.

" Well," said Mr. Smith uncertainly, " you both talk English . . . so I thought . . . naturally . . ."

" Our mother was English," said Louisa.

"I see," said Mr. Smith.

"She was an earl's daughter," said Jeri.

The girl laughed, a bright laugh, like clear wind and water; and Mr. Smith laughed too. "Jeri," she cried; "you are impossible.

"How he makes things up," she said. And she added,

"He was only a baronet."

Mr. Smith stopped laughing all of a sudden. Now she is trying to make a fool of me, he thought.

"I am Louisa," she said, "and this is my brother, Jeri."

"I am glad to meet you," said Mr. Smith politely.

"And you? You would not like to tell us your name?"

"Smith," he said.

“Smith,” said Louisa. “I shall remember.”

Jeri rose, and gravely held out his hand. “How do you do, Smith,” he said. And he added simply, “We live here.”

Mr. Smith looked down at him; he saw a slender little body in worn overalls, a clear-cut, young face, not smiling, but eager and proud. He doesn’t weigh much at that, he thought; I guess he didn’t hurt the boat any.

“I will show you how I fish,” said Jeri. “I will show you how I caught the flounder.”

Mr. Smith turned to Louisa. “Look,” he said; “is there a town nearby where I could go to buy some lumber?”

She pointed out across the bay, into the wind. “There,” she said. And waving her hand to the east, she added,

“Truro is behind us.”

He looked across the water to Provincetown, far off, dim and blue in the sun, and shook his head regretfully. "Too far," he said.

"What is there in Truro?"

She pursed her lips, considering. "There is a store for buying whiskey," she said, "and a library. And two little stores for buying vegetables and bread. There is a post office; and a place for buying gasoline. There is a fire engine; and a plumber.

"But I do not know any place for buying wood."

"How shall I get to Provincetown?"

"There is a bus," she said. "Only I do not know when it goes."

Suddenly her face lighted up. "Why did I not think of it?" she exclaimed. "There is Mr. Bag-hot. He lives not very far from here. I will bring him to see you."



“ When? ” asked Mr. Smith. “ Soon? Right away? ”

“ Some day,” said Louisa.

“ Now you had better have some coffee.”

CHAPTER

5

“ I expect I could bring you what you need,” said Mr. Baghot. “ You aiming to do the whole work yourself? ”

“ Do you think I can? ” asked Mr. Smith uncertainly.

They sat on the tilted deck of the *Thetis*, and watched the small waves breaking below them, along the beach. “ Well,” said Mr. Baghot, “ I

could maybe get around to giving you a hand in two, three weeks."

"Then I had better do it myself," said Mr. Smith.

"Just as you say," declared Mr. Baghot. "I've got to be up to Wellfleet on some business, coming day after tomorrow. You in a hurry to get anywhere special? "

Mr. Smith looked at the bare, yellow sand, empty except for a solitary swimmer far down the beach. "I was going to find a place to be free," he said.

Mr. Baghot nodded. "Summer's a terrible crowded time," he said.

He pulled a plug of tobacco from his pocket, cut off a slice, broke it in his fingers, and stuffed the pieces into his pipe. "You from far, Mister? " he asked.

“From Hyannis,” said Mr. Smith ruefully.

“Well, that’s not far,” agreed Mr. Baghot. “In business there?”

“I am at the college,” said Mr. Smith.

Mr. Baghot waved his pipe courteously in the air. “How do things look to you?” he asked.

“Not very good,” said Mr. Smith.

“No,” said Mr. Baghot. “They don’t.” He was silent for a moment, staring at his pipe. “Had the navy here last week,” he declared. “Two cruisers, twelve submarines, and two tenders.”

Mr. Smith made no reply. His heart felt heavy, and he wished that Mr. Baghot would go away. Must we talk about what is going on in the world? he thought. No one cares any more, really; our hearts do not have any anger or sorrow left, they have been broken too often. So many betrayals . . . so many disasters . . .

Mr. Baghot lit a match on his thumbnail. " Ever see a goosefish? " he asked at length.

" No," said Mr. Smith.

" Took four duck out of the stomach of a goosefish last October," said Mr. Baghot thoughtfully. He gave the statement a moment or two to sink in. " Four duck and an old shoe," he amended.

" There's a lot of folks think we shouldn't interfere," he said.

Mr. Smith closed his eyes. Interfere with what? he thought. Go away, go away; don't ask me to think and argue. The heroic age is over, it has nothing to do with us. We cannot even fight for freedom, unless we are given leave.

But no one cares. Let us not sit here in the sand, talking about it. . . .

Mr. Baghot went home to his wife, who was waiting to give him dinner. " That man," he said,

“takes a downright gloomy view of it.”

“I don’t blame him,” said Mrs. Baghot. “With his boat smashed up on the beach.”

“He seems purely put out to me,” said Mr. Baghot.

“Well, now,” said Mrs. Baghot, “eat your dinner. You got to go down to the center, to call for my sister Emily’s child. She’s coming on the noon bus.”

“What child is that?” asked Mr. Baghot in alarm.

“Meg,” said Mrs. Baghot. “The youngest.”

“She going to stay here?” asked Mr. Baghot bleakly.

“Her mother’s sick,” said Mrs. Baghot. “I told her I’d take the child for a spell.”

“She sick bad?”

“No; but she can’t get around too good.”

“ How old’s this child? ” asked Mr. Baghot.
 “ I’ve sort of forgot.”

“ Eight; and she’s a nice good child.”

Mr. Baghot looked at his wife’s firm face, and sighed. “ All right,” he said; “ leave her come.

“ I guess she won’t harm us any.”

Seated alone on the deck of the *Thetis*, with his legs dangling over the side, Mr. Smith stared moodily at the water. After a while, he let himself down from the deck, and started toward the river mouth, through which the tide was pouring inland in an endless wave.

For a moment he stood on the rocks, watching it, the broad, yellow beaches stretching out around him, the low dunes topped with coarse grass, the terns circling and diving as they fished in the stream. Then he turned and walked inland, following the current toward the dark green hills,

to where he could see the roof of the scow around a bend in the river, and Jeri wading in the stream, pulling the dory to the shore.

“Hello,” he said. “I thought I’d come see where you live.”

“I have to fetch Louisa,” said Jeri earnestly. “She has gone to the store. But I will be right back, if you will wait.”

“Can I go with you?” asked Mr. Smith. “I should be glad to row a little.”

“Well,” said Jeri slowly, “if you wish to, of course. Though the current is very good, going there. . . .

“Would you like to row coming back?” he asked hopefully.

“Both ways,” said Mr. Smith, smiling.

“Very well,” said Jeri. And he explained, as he settled happily in the stern: “I do not mind to

do it. It is good exercise for the muscles."

The boat slipped along in the current, toward the town landing. Mr. Smith handled the oars, caught a crab, and felt his back creak. "Do you like it here?" he asked; "you and your sister?"

"It is nice," said Jeri. "It is better than the little room in the city."

"But lonely, perhaps?"

"I have Louisa," said Jeri simply. "And there are also some children who come to play on the beach."

"Are they friendly?" asked Mr. Smith curiously.

"No," said Jeri. "They are not friends with me yet. They fight with me."

"Well," Mr. Smith began, uncertainly. Children are always like that, he thought. They must have something to dislike, even before they look

for something to love. Love is for later; for the grown-ups.

“Never mind,” he said. “They’ll get over it.”

“I know,” said Jeri. “But first I will hit them.

“I will be strong, because of my good exercise.”

He trailed his fingers in the water, watching the little wave they made. “Will Mr. Baghot help you to fix your boat?” he asked.

“I believe so,” said Mr. Smith. “But he is very busy.”

“He is always busy,” said Jeri. “Have you sailed across the sea in your boat?”

“No,” said Mr. Smith.

“England is across the sea,” said Jeri. He looked gravely up at Mr. Smith. “I have friends in England,” he said. And he added, after a moment,

“I wish they were here.”

“I wish they were, too,” said Mr. Smith.

Louisa was waiting on the beach at the town landing, in her faded blue overalls, the sun bright in her hair, and the water cool on her ankles. Her feet were bare, and she carried a big paper bag in her arms. "Hello," she said. "Are you going to row us? "

"Yes," said Mr. Smith.

"First I would like to swim," she announced.

"I am so hot."

She put the bag in the boat, and caught her hair up in a yellow twist on top of her head. Then, without a word, she slipped out of her overalls. Mr. Smith held his breath; he looked away, feeling that his face was pale.

But actually she still had something on. "Do you like my bathing suit? " she asked.

She stood looking down at herself thoughtfully, at the round, slender body, faint honey-

colored from the sun, at the two small pieces of cloth which covered it. "I made it myself," she said. "Out of a shawl. Still . . . if you think . . ."

And feeling suddenly confused, she went quickly into the water, and rolled away like a seal.

"I am going to swim with Louisa," cried Jeri, throwing off his clothes. A moment later, he too was splashing noisily in the water beside the boat. "Look," he said; "I can dive."

And he fell forward onto his face, with a terrific crash. He came up out of breath, his eyes tight shut, water streaming from his hair. "I am a very good diver," he declared. "Would you like to see me float? "

And he launched himself again upon the stream. But this time he kept one leg safely on the bottom.

“Do you think that is very good?” he asked, when he had got his balance again.

“Yes, indeed,” said Mr. Smith. But he was watching Louisa. How well she swims, he thought; like a little sea animal, pushing through the water.

She came back to the boat again, and climbed in over the side. “Oh,” she cried happily, “that was good. It was so far from the store, and there was no one to give me a ride. But now I am quite well again.

“Come Jeri; do not keep us waiting.”

“Once more, Louisa?” he begged. “I wish to do a great dive.”

“No,” said Louisa.

They sat together, dripping in the stern, drying in the sun, as Mr. Smith rowed them back against the tide. The sun was hot, and the current was

strong, the oars hurt his hands. I wish that I had gone in too, he thought; but perhaps it would have seemed a little strange. . . . I will go back to the boat, and go in by myself. After all, I do not know these people. . . . I do not know anything about them. . . .

Louisa ruffled her brother's wet hair. "Is it not nice, Jeri," she laughed, "to have someone to do the great works for us?" The child nodded, clamping his jaws together to keep them from chattering. "It is too bad he could not come to live with us," she said; "then he could always do them."

She was still smiling; she looked up at him across the wet boards of the dory, her eyes wide and dark with amusement. His own eyes widened as he looked at her; it was like a sudden blow,



he could feel it down his spine, and through his arms. For a moment he stopped rowing.

Here, he thought; here.

Whoa.

CHAPTER

6

It was two days before Mr. Smith came back to the scow — two days in which he had swum by himself in the river, and walked by himself on the roads between the bay and the ocean. The gorse was yellow on the slopes, and in the hollows there were still drifts of dying beach-plum blossoms, like faded honeysuckle. The little houses stood humble and clean behind their clumps of bridal-

wreath, the roses climbed over them, red, white, and yellow; and on the great hill, the old church and the meeting house brooded over the valleys.

He was alone; all was clear and still. A few summer visitors had opened their houses; the voices of children rose from the yards and gardens, but far away, lost in the warm air. On the outer beaches, where the green waves of ocean smashed and tumbled, the drift of winter storms still lay scattered on the sand. This was the quiet he had asked for; here he was free.

It did not make him altogether happy. He found himself, to his surprise, growing restless; it seemed to him that something was missing; that there was something he ought to do, something — was it pleasant? He was not sure.

On the morning of the third day, he said to

himself: "I believe that I ought to find out how they are getting along, on the scow."

He found Louisa doing the week's washing in a tin pail, while Jeri hung the wet clothes out on a fish line from the deck to the shore. There were not many pieces, but what there were gave to the scow an even more homely appearance than before. "Here is Smith," said Louisa to her brother, "who has come to help us. He will hang the high ones which you cannot reach."

"I could reach them," said Jeri stoutly, "if I was bigger."

But he was glad, just the same, to hand the wet pieces over.

"I wonder," said Mr. Smith, "if perhaps you would like . . . well, that is . . . I thought that I might give a little dinner . . . that is to say, on the boat. . . ."

“ On the boat? ” breathed Jeri.

“ Of course,” added Mr. Smith uncomfortably,
“ it would be very simple.”

“ That does not matter,” said Louisa. “ We
would be glad, anyhow.”

And she added hopefully,

“ When would this be? ”

“ Tonight? ” asked Mr. Smith, who had not
really thought about it at all.

“ Tonight would be nice. We will come before
sunset.”

Mr. Smith went back to the *Thetis* feeling confused, but pleased. For the rest of the morning, he cleaned the cabin, straightened out his few belongings, polished the bright work, and thought about dinner. In the afternoon, he walked to the village, and bought a few supplies at the store, fresh milk for Jeri, butter, bread, and a little box

of strawberries. The tide was still coming, but low; he forded the river in water to his middle, and walked through the coarse tick-grass along the dunes behind the scow. He did not want Louisa to see him bringing the dinner back with him; it struck him as indelicate.

He set up the tiny tilt-table on either side of the center-board, brought out his plates, of which there were two, a glass for Jeri, a cup for Louisa, and all the cutlery. The *Thetis* being lodged at a slight angle in the sand, the plates slid gently along the wood to the table's rim, before they came to rest. As the sun sank, he lit his port and starboard lanterns; red and green, they burned with a clear light through the dusk, across the empty beach. And Jeri, coming around the rocks at the river, saw them, and stood still with delight.

“Look, Louisa,” he breathed.

“It is astonishing,” she agreed.

In a happy mood, and with a shy smile, she approached the *Thetis* across the cold, hard sand. It was the first time she had been asked anywhere; the sunset lay low in the sky, the yellow light ebbing away down the green runnels of the west. There, in full tide, the day went on, toward other towns and countries; it rolled, blue and peaceful, over fields and forests, over farms and steeples far away. But it is still America, she thought; it is still this one same land, and where the sun is now, all is friendly toward me.

Mr. Smith helped them over the side, lifting Jeri by the arms, pulling Louisa up by her cool, strong hands. “Glad to have you aboard,” he said politely, having read this phrase in a book about the navy. And he led the way down the two steps to the cabin.

Seeing the table set, Jeri let out a long sigh. "Louisa," he said again, in tones of wonder:

"There are sardines."

"I could not get very much," Mr. Smith explained hastily. "And my cooking . . . there is only the little spirit stove. . . ."

"But it is wonderful," said Louisa. "We do not afford sardines."

She looked at the glowing berries, heaped in a round white bowl beside her. "It is altogether too much," she said.

"I have never had these things," said Jeri, poking at them with his finger. "How does one do? "

"One does nothing yet," said Louisa. "They are for later."

Sitting beside her in the little cabin, the lantern motionless in its bracket above him, Mr. Smith

tried to imagine that he was at sea, to forget the keel resting in the sand, and the hole beneath him in the planking. But moths flying about the light with soft wings, and the lapping of waves on the shingle, disturbed these innocent thoughts, and with a sigh he remarked,

“ They say that there is good sailing off the coast of Maine.”

“ Yes? ” said Louisa. “ I have never been there. But I have been to Fall River.”

“ We did not like it,” said Jeri.

“ What were you doing in Fall River? ” asked Mr. Smith in surprise.

“ It was where the bus took us,” said Louisa.

“ And then we walked.”

“ And Mr. Baghot found us,” said Jeri.

Mr. Smith sighed. He felt the mystery of these two, who lived on a scow, on a sand bank in a

river; who had come from so far away, and from such different circumstances.

But he did not know where they had come from.

“It is thus,” said Louisa, “that the pilgrims arrived at these shores, in the cabin of a ship, and gave thanks, like we.”

“I should like my berries now, please,” said Jeri, holding out his plate.

I do not believe she has told me the truth about herself, thought Mr. Smith; but it is true that she is a foreigner. And he smiled, imagining himself eating sardines and strawberries with a young woman whose mother had been the daughter of an earl . . . or was it a baronet?

Though why it should make any difference, he said to himself . . .

“How little does one know what life will

bring," said Louisa. "A year ago at this time, I thought that I would not live." She took a deep breath, turning her mind resolutely from the past. "Now I know that one must not be afraid," she said.

A moth flew by her cheek, and she tossed her bright hair back from her face. "You do not know of any position for me?" she asked.

"Position?" Mr. Smith repeated stupidly. What a strange question.

"I do not know how to do anything," she admitted.

"No," said Mr. Smith; "I do not know what you could do."

He saw her face grow tense, and her eyes open wide, as though they stared at darkness. Then, slowly, her cheeks grew pink, and she looked away.

“Never mind,” she said quietly. “I do not mean to trouble you.”

But he was already troubled. He thought of the exiles of other wars and revolutions, stranded like herring on the beaches of the world. Whom had they troubled but themselves? Perhaps it didn't matter what became of anyone. . . .

“Have you somewhere to go,” he asked, “after the summer?”

“No,” she said. “But I have a roof, and a stove.”

“The scow?”

She nodded.

“But you cannot stay there,” he exclaimed. “You would freeze.”

She laughed at the sound of worry in his voice. “It is still June,” she reminded him. “One does not freeze until December. Or November.”

“ Do not feel so badly for me.”

She looked across the table at her brother, solemnly eating his strawberries; and she made a sudden helpless gesture with her hands. “ If it were only myself,” she said. “ But there are two of us.”

All at once, Mr. Smith felt weary. Yes, he thought; there are two of you; and you will freeze, and have nothing to eat. Why do you trouble me with it? I cannot help you.

I cannot do anything.

CHAPTER

7

Rain whipped over the low hills, slanting down the valleys from the northeast, where the dark clouds rode low upon the sea. The wind moaned through the valleys, bending the long grass in silver strings, tossing the stubby branches, hurling the rain against the wet, black trunks. The wind was fresh and cold off the sea, sweet with sudden gusts of woodsmoke as the summer people huddled before their fires of oak, cedar, and pine. The

others turned their furnaces on as in winter, or sat beside kerosene stoves, warm and comfortable.

Mr. Baghot drove his old, yellow truck to Provincetown through the rain, to get some lumber for Mr. Smith. He thought he would float it down the river with the tide, and then tow it up the beach to where the *Thetis* lay. There was another week or so before he'd be able to do any work on the boat himself, but he figured that a rainy day was as good as any other for doing errands. Besides, he had a stove handle to buy for the scow; and he wanted to see his trawler, the *Emily*, which was tied up at Manuel Furtado's wharf for repairs. As part owner, he would have to pay part of the expense.

"I calculate we ought to do better this year," he said to his partner, Captain Tony Pacheco, "what with nothing coming from Norway." But Captain

Tony shrugged his shoulders. "You tell me where there's whiting," he said, "and by God I'll go get them."

"Mackerel's eight cents at Boston," said Mr. Baghot hopefully.

"Sure," said Captain Tony; "sure. Only where you going to find them?"

Mr. Baghot returned to Truro with the stove handle, in a sober mood. "I declare," he said, "it's hardly worth trying, these days." And leaving Mr. Smith's lumber in the yard outside, he went into the house, to ease his mind to Mrs. Baghot.

However, Mrs. Baghot was at a Red Cross meeting at the post office. Only Meg, her sister Emily's child, was home. "Hello, Uncle Alfred," she said. "What you doing?"

She herself was doing nothing; and it was dreary

indoors, all alone, in the rain. Her brown pigtails bounced on her back, as she came forward with a hopeful hop out of the gloom of the sitting room.

“I’m a busy man,” said Mr. Baghot uneasily, tipping the water out of his hat. “I’ve got to take this stove handle down to the folks on the scow.”

“Can I go with you, please?” she asked.

He hesitated, not wanting the trouble of taking her along, yet seeing how eager and alone she was. “If you’re minded to,” he said at last, without enthusiasm.

She slipped into her slicker, and stood waiting for him, a small, grave figure, with a plain, mousey face. “I’m ready, Uncle Alfred,” she said.

“Don’t be in such a fret,” said Mr. Baghot. “I haven’t hardly filled my pipe yet.”

They drove to the town landing in the truck,

with the dark rain slanting on the windshield, and the roads black and wet under them. "Are there folks in the scow?" she asked. "Are they really staying there?"

He nodded gravely. "Yep," he said. "Young lady and her brother; boy about your age.

"Foreigners," he added. "From across the sea."

She took a deep breath. "Oh me," she whispered.

And she sat for the rest of the way in silence, dazzled at the richness of life.

The little cabin on the scow was warm and close, steamy with woolens drying before the stove. Some of them belonged to Mr. Smith, who was seated as near to the stove as he could get. He held a cup of tea in his hands, curving his fingers around it for warmth.

"I've brought you a stove handle, ma'am," said

Mr. Baghot, in the doorway; “ seems to me I remembered you’d spoke about it.”

“ Come in, Mr. Baghot,” cried Louisa. “ I am so glad to see you.”

Mr. Baghot inclined his head toward Mr. Smith. “ I got your lumber up to the house,” he said. “ Aim to bring it down to you most any day now.”

“ Will you have a cup of tea? ” asked Louisa.

“ Don’t mind if I do,” said Mr. Baghot. Settling himself next to Mr. Smith, he looked around with a shy, pleased air. “ That stove keeps you warm nice and good,” he said.

“ It is a marvelous stove,” cried Louisa. “ It is so full of heat.” And turning to Meg, who was still standing in the doorway, she held out her hand in a friendly gesture. “ Come in and get warm, little girl,” she said; “ whoever you are.”

Meg made no move; she stood where she was, silent and awkward, the raindrops shining in her hair. "She's my wife's sister's girl," said Mr. Bag-hot. "Stopping with us for a spell."

"Come in, child," said Louisa; "come in."

But the child only stared at her, with her mouth open, and her heart in her eyes. This, then, was the foreigner; this was the woman from across the sea. What strangeness, what a marvel; what a picture of beauty and wonder. Was she a princess? They also came from across the sea, and were the color of honey and gold, like this one . . .

Her glance moved slowly past Louisa, and came to rest on Jeri. At once the body of her shyness changed; she became woman, though small and speechless. With a crab-like motion, she edged her way from the door to the nearest bunk, and

shrank back into the corner, against the wall. It was not so much in order to hide, as to watch like a deer, or a tigress, from the thicket.

And Jeri knew that she was watching him. He did not look at her, yet saw perfectly, perhaps out of the back of his head, her small, stubborn, and withholding face. He did not find her at all charming, but that did not make her any less important to him; the child takes what he needs, not only love; his little world must have its humbler services as well.

He did not address her directly, but spoke to her through the others. "That is a very good fire in the stove," he said. "I made it myself, with the wood. I went up the beach a good long ways to fetch it. Smith will tell you, because he saw me. I was carrying a very big log . . . I did not need anyone to help me. . . ."

Mr. Smith and Mr. Baghot stared at him in silence. But Louisa understood; she glanced at Meg out of the corner of her eye, and rumped Jeri's hair. "That is enough," she said gently.

"Would you care to feel my muscle?" asked Jeri, holding his arm out to Mr. Baghot.

"Well," said Mr. Baghot unhappily, feeling the tiny cylinder of bone and flesh between his broad fingers, "hm. Yes sir. Well."

"Jeri," said Louisa. She spoke quietly, but there was a sudden chill in her voice which made Mr. Smith's spine tingle. Jeri gave his sister a swift glance, half defiant, half frightened; then he turned away, his mouth puckered in a soundless whistle.

"Guess we better be getting on," said Mr. Baghot.

And he got up, without saying anything more.

His niece followed him in silence, without a word to anyone, without a backward glance.

She sat in the truck again, on the high seat behind the watery windshield, and the black road wound away behind her. "Uncle Alfred," she said.

"Yes? "

"That woman," she said, "the one . . . you know . . . the one that said for me to come in. . . ."

"Wasn't any other there," said Mr. Baghot.

"Well, that's the one I mean," said Meg.
"Was she . . .

"Was she a princess? "

Mr. Baghot squinted at the road ahead. "Might be at that," he remarked indifferently. "It wouldn't startle me."

"Oh me," said Meg.

And she sat holding her breath with delight, bouncing up and down on the hard seat of the truck.

That night in her attic room under the blowing rain, under the whipping branches of the trees, she wrote to her mother in Brockton. "Dear Mom," she wrote:

"How are you? It is raining here. Uncle Alfred took me to see a woman, she is a forriner and she lives in the scow, and there is a little boy, he is a forriner too. I think he is a prince or Something. Uncle Alfred said it would not stottle me. Please send me my plaid dress, the one with the blue ribbons, I would like to wear it sometime.

Yours sincerely,

Your loveing daughter,

Meg."

While in the scow, Jeri, safe in bed, listened to the wind tugging at the old planks, heard the river sweeping past the shore, and remarked to his sister,

“We are lucky to have this good little house to live in.”

“Yes,” said Louisa absently. “And to have kind people for our friends. Say your prayers now, little one, and prepare to sleep.”

Jeri obediently clasped his hands together in the darkness. “God bless Jeri,” he said.

“I am tired of coming last,” he explained.

“And Louisa, and our father and mother in heaven, and Mr. and Mrs. Baghot . . . and . . . and . . .”

“Yes?”

“And Smith. . . .”



“And Smith,” said Louisa simply.

With a comfortable sigh, he turned over on his side. “That was a nice little girl,” he said, before he fell asleep.

CHAPTER

8

The summer-children played on the beach at Cornhill, splashing in the shallows with shrill cries, drifting on the waves in blown-up rubber tubes, gathering shells, digging tunnels and castles in the sand. Dogs barked, and ran into the water after sticks; while mothers and nurses sat in the sun, offering their shoulders, backs, arms, and legs to the gentle heat which was slowly turning them

brown. The level bay lay like a wash of blue under the clear, light sky, deepening away to the faint loom of Plymouth like a low cloud in the west.

Jeri stood by himself, rocking up and down on his feet, watching three children playing together. They had built a fortress against the tide, a sand castle with many moats and corridors, and several pieces of wood. It looked, thought Jeri, like a very good thing.

“I have a castle too,” he said after a while, to no one in particular. “It has a forest around it. It is very old and big; it is quite a great castle.”

The children did not stop playing right away. But presently the larger of the boys gave a shove to the wall he was building, and began to kick the sand around in all directions. “That’s what I do to that old thing,” he said to his friends.

The other children watched him with interest,

but without surprise. They, too, did not feel like building castles any more.

“ Hurrah,” cried Jeri; and jumped happily upon the ruins. At once a small, tight, hard fist hit him between the shoulder blades, tumbling him face down into the sand. He came up with sand in his mouth and in his hair, and a startled look on his face. “ Why did you do that? ” he demanded.

The other boy did not answer. He looked at Jeri calmly; he had an air of having done something sensible, and manly. He did not dislike Jeri, who was a stranger to him; but he had his own way to make in the world.

“ I can beat you,” he announced.

It was a thought which consoled him for much that was disappointing in his own life. The world was wide, danger and humiliation were everywhere; yet here was someone he could beat.

He was in no hurry to do it. He stuck out his under lip at Jeri. " You think I'm scared of you? " he asked.

Jeri said nothing; he thought, I am littler than he is. At the same time, he could not very well run away.

A tentative push threw him off balance again. " Go on, Jimmie," cried one of the boys. " Bust him one."

Jimmie clenched his fists, scowled, looked as ugly as he could, and took up a position of defense. But there was nothing to defend himself from.

" He won't fight," he said at last, with scorn and relief. " He's scared of me."

And he ran off with his friends, laughing and whispering.

Jeri was not afraid. He understood that life was full of violence, and that a strange child often



has to fight with other children, without knowing why; but he hoped to find someone smaller than himself to do the fighting with, or else he hoped to acquire more muscle before it began.

But it was lonely for him on the beach with no one to play with, and for a moment water and sky swam together in a salty mist. "Well," he said uncertainly . . .

He turned away; and saw Mrs. Baghot's sister's child Meg coming across the sand toward him. She came slowly, with many turns and halts, and with an indirect, sidewise step which made it look as though she were not going anywhere. It brought her to within a few feet of him; and there she stopped.

Her heart was beating hard with joy and daring, yet they neither of them spoke or even looked at each other. She gazed thoughtfully out to sea; and

he scrabbled with his toe in the sand. But slowly her being there brought back the happy feeling in his breast; and still not looking at her, he finally cried,

“Come on,” and dashed away down the beach in wild rabbit-like leaps.

The sand spurted from under her bare heels as she followed, like a small huntress, swift and exultant. So much had been settled in those few moments . . . he knew her, he accepted her; her whole being shone with joy, like a little lamp. Near the water, he flung himself down on his knees, and began digging in the soft, wet sand.

“We will build a tunnel,” he said. “You take that side.”

Sitting across from each other, busy, absorbed, they dug for a while in silence. Presently she let her hands drop in her lap, and looked up at him,

from between her mousy braids. "Did you mind what those boys did?" she asked shyly.

He kept his head down, up to his arm-pits in the sand. "They did not do anything," he said. "All they did was they wished to fight with me."

"Boys are always fighting," she said. "They think it's smart."

"I can fight them," said Jeri. "I have some good muscles."

"They think it's so smart," she said.

She dug a little more, and then stopped again, sitting back on her haunches, looking around for something to say. "There's crabs in the water here," she said. "They bite you."

"They do not bite much," said Jeri. "They are only little crabs."

She thought, I know better because they are my crabs, because I live in this country, and you are a

stranger. But she did not want to hurt him. She wanted him to like her; she wanted him to notice her delicacy and refinement. And in a hopeful way, she remarked,

“ I’m afraid of snakes and spiders.”

He looked at her in surprise, but without the sympathy she had expected. “ Why? ” he asked.

“ Oh, I don’t know,” she said. “ I just am.”

“ Well, I’m not.”

“ You’re a boy,” she said.

Jeri nodded his head gravely; he supposed that was it. A boy was not afraid of things, like a girl.

“ My father was a soldier,” he said.

Now that they had something to talk about, she grew more lively. “ My grandfather was a soldier, too,” she announced. “ He fit in the war.”

“ My father was a captain,” said Jeri. “ He fou . . . fit; but the Germans beat.”

“ My cousin Edward was a major,” said Meg, in awful tones.

“ My father was probably a colonel,” said Jeri. “ Louisa said he fit like a hero, so I think they made him a colonel.”

“ Is Louisa your mother? ”

He stared at her in astonishment. “ How funny,” he exclaimed. “ Louisa is my sister. My mother is dead.

“ My mother was a princess.”

There it was. I knew it, thought Meg, I knew it. It was like a chant of glory; she could feel the blood rushing, singing in her ears; and in a small voice, a little tremulous, and slightly nasal, she asked,

“ Are you a prince? ”

“ No,” said Jeri, “ I am not a prince. I am only a count, like my father. My uncle was a prince,

and my other uncle, who was an archbishop.

“When I grow up, I will be a captain, like my father.”

“When I grow up,” said Meg dreamily . . .

When I grow up; it is the first thought of childhood, the endless dream, the lasting comfort. I will tell you all that I hope for when I grow up; and you will tell me. There is an enormous amount of it, and it is forever changing; it does not stay the same from one day to another. Most of it is far above our heads, far beyond our reach, but that does not make any difference. All the swift, shy hopes which rise like birds in the heart . . . all the love, all the glory . . . I shall have all these rich dreams, when I grow up . . .

“I’m going to be a school teacher like Miss Ames in our school,” said Meg.

“ I do not go to school,” said Jeri. “ My sister teaches me.”

“ I was in third grade last year,” said Meg. “ I’ll be in fourth, next.” She was very happy, talking about herself. “ All my friends are there,” she said.

It was not a fortunate remark. For it reminded Jeri that all his friends were across the sea, and many dead, and all in danger. “ I will tell you about my friends,” he said. “ They have gone to France and England, but now in France it is worse than at home. And in England there is not enough to eat, and the children do not have warm clothes to wear. And then, they are shooting them all the time. The planes come over and drop bombs on them, just like they did to us. We ran away; and then we came here. But Genevieve went to Eng-

land. She is my dearest cousin, I love her very dearly. We used to play together at home, in the great park of our castle. When the Germans came I did not see her any more, but Louisa had a letter which said that she was in England with Cousin Laura. I wish Genevieve was here; that is what I wish more than anything, except for my father and mother."

Meg sat listening quietly, feeling her heart grow heavier and heavier. It was not for the plight of the children; they meant little or nothing to her, no more than children in fairy stories, who were eaten by the wolves. Even her closest friends meant little to her, actually; she would never have missed them, and if one had died, she might have mourned, but it would have been for herself, for the sudden shadow of death on her bright day, and out of fear. Children in Europe meant as

little as flies to her; but Genevieve . . . Oh, Genevieve.

For here, sitting on the beach in Truro, Jeri was thinking about Genevieve; he was wishing that she were here with him, he had called her his dearest love, or at least his cousin, but one could love one's cousin too. And all her hopes, which were at best no meatier than a butterfly, and all her dreams, so shy and scarce that she herself had barely caught a glimpse of them — dreams of a prince from across the sea, or a count, but what was the difference? — fell all to ruin because of Genevieve. Oh me.

Her eyes grew more and more mournful, until Jeri, thinking that the war had touched her, asked her politely,

“ Shall I go on? ”

She wanted to say no. But she was of tough



New England earth, made up of bits of hickory and granite, with acid in the soil to eat its own heart out. She clenched her hands.

“Tell me about Genevieve some more,” she said.

CHAPTER

9

Clouds rose in the west, rolled dark and stormy around the bowl of the sea, and vanished in the north like thunder; the sun shone on Truro, and Mr. Smith and Mr. Baghot worked on the *Thetis* together. They had got her up on a cradle, with some difficulty; the first jack had slipped, and the second cracked the cement block Mr. Baghot had laid down for it to rest on. "By God," he said



bitterly, "that old block wasn't no better than the sand she was made of. Got her off Jeb Allers; should have known better. We'll have to put down a piece of wood for a rest for these jacks; you go up that way a spell, and see can you find a good strong piece of wood."

They had found an old beam to rest the jacks on, and had got the boat up far enough for the two-by-fours to be criss-crossed under her. Now they were working at the hole in her side. "Mind you," said Mr. Baghot, "I'll do the best I'm able, but I'm no boat builder. The man you'd ought to see is Manuel Furtado, over to Provincetown."

"Don't blame me if your boat don't look too much like a yacht, time we're done."

The tide was out, the air smelled of salty weeds. Mr. Baghot's hammer made a loud sound on the empty beach; he was a fast worker, he kept his

mouth full of nails, and went from one thing to another without wasting any time.

Prompt on the stroke of noon, he stopped and laid his hammer down. "Time for my dinner," he announced; and got out the box of food put up for him at home. Mr. Smith, crawling hungrily out from inside the cabin, found Louisa standing on the sand below, holding a small basket. "I have brought you my lunch," she said, "because I thought, he will be too busy with all this work to think about his own, and so we will eat my lunch together."

"Thank you very much," said Mr. Smith happily.

The three of them sat forward on the *Thetis*, peaceful and comfortable in the sun. Mr. Baghot did the best eating, since Louisa had not been able to get together more than bread and cheese,



a tomato, one hard-boiled egg for the two of them, and coffee. "It is not very much," she explained, "but until I heard the hammers, I did not begin to think about the preparations."

"This is fine," said Mr. Smith, trying not to notice, out of the corner of his eye, Mr. Baghot's large piece of salami.

"No," said Louisa; "I did not have the money to make a good meal. It will only keep you from fainting."

She seemed so solemn, so anxious, and so kind, that he could not help laughing. She looked at him in surprise; then she colored, and turned away. "Do not make fun at going hungry," she said. "It is a serious thing."

"I wasn't really laughing," he said. "Not at that."

"Well," she said uncertainly, ". . . I do think

of all those at home, who have nothing."

He shook his head; there it was again, the mist across the sun, all the brightness grown dim. "What good does it do?" he asked unhappily.

She broke the shell of the egg against the deck, and began to peel it slowly. "So often," she said, "I think, if I could only bring them here."

Mr. Baghot took a big swallow of bread and meat. "Crowd us out," he said briefly.

She looked at the empty beach, at the bare dunes, and the still water. "There is much room," she said.

"If I were you, I would not be afraid. I would say to everyone, Come, here is freedom."

"Maybe so," said Mr. Baghot noncommittally.

Mr. Smith swung his heels backward and forward against the side of the boat. If only it were as easy as that, he thought; Come, here is freedom.

She had such a child's view; she would invite everybody, and they would all go hungry, like herself.

But at least, he thought, she wanted to do something; she wasn't torn by indecision, by a feeling of helplessness; she didn't stop to weigh and argue. Though it was true that she had nothing to lose. . . .

For a moment, for a few seconds, he wondered what anyone had to lose. Was it so sweet merely to live? to exist a little longer, by doing nothing . . . to keep the heart going, the blood pumping . . . the eyes shut tight, the hands folded, the love withheld. . . .

"Freedom," said Mr. Baghot slowly; "well, now, I don't know." He took out his plug of tobacco, and began to whittle at it, cramming the yellow shavings into his old brown pipe. "You

ever see squid come up on the beach at night?" he asked. "It's a funny thing, the way they beach themselves. They're right set to die; toss them back, they come in again. Never could figure what was in their minds; bass, maybe, off shore, or something else."

He lit his pipe, and took up his hammer again. "Be getting back to work," he said.

Mr. Smith looked at Louisa in silence. She didn't say anything; she was looking down at the water, and her hands were clasped in her lap. After a while she drew a long, uneven breath, and he saw, to his dismay, a tear run down her cheek. "Are we like that?" she whispered.

I'm not so sure, he thought unhappily; I'm not at all sure. "No," he said; "no; of course not."

"It was a cruel way to speak," she said. She

shook her head sadly and slowly. "But perhaps he is right," she said. "Perhaps we will die here in this bitter air."

"We won't let you," he said roughly.

She put the knuckles of her hands against the deck, and stood up. "You are kind," she said; "you have a good heart. But so is he; and he is not afraid to speak the truth. I should not be afraid to hear it, either.

"Still . . . men are not squids. And there is a right and a wrong, and I do not believe that God does not know this."

He watched her go back across the sand; at the rocks she turned and waved, and he thought that she was smiling. He went back into the cabin to help Mr. Baghot.

At four o'clock Mr. Baghot went home, and Mr. Smith went along with him in the dory, to

buy some supplies at the store. Then, since the tide would not be low enough to ford the river until dark, he put off his return, and walked for a while along the Pamet roads, breathing in the sweet land-smell of broom, wild fern, and scrub pine. The evening light faded slowly; from a hill he saw, far off, facing him, the dark shadow of ocean, while behind him the sunset glowed upon the bay and river. And here, away from the beach and the empty sand, among houses and men, he felt suddenly lonely, felt the great sweep of unresponsive earth beneath him, which was man's home, the cottages with their blinds drawn, the doors shut against one another across the whole uncaring land. Only strangers lived here, and roads went on toward unknown hills and hollows. Now, he thought, I know how Louisa must feel; now I can understand — for this one moment at

least, in this one twilight — what it is to be homeless and alone in a foreign country.

He bought something to eat at the center, added a pint of whiskey to his supplies, and went on to the post office, to ask if there was any mail for him. There was none, and he had not really expected any; it was just that he did not want to be alone, that he wanted to hear talk around him, to hear laughter and greetings, to see faces in the lamp light, smiling and friendly. The young people gathered in the post office like moths around a light, their voices met in a wave of happy sound, American voices, eager and careless; they warmed his heart; he thought I must bring Louisa here, it will do her good to see these young people. . . .

He walked home through the darkness, down the long road to the river-head, part of the time under the clear, starry sky, part of the time in the

deep shadow of trees. The frogs sang around him, he heard the bitterns boom in the marshes. And as he walked, he thought about freedom, and he remembered what Mr. Baghot had said. Perhaps it is true that we cannot give freedom to everyone, he thought. For freedom is space, among other things; and when space gets too crowded, you haven't got it any more.

The cool night air, sweet with flowering locust, fell like dew against his cheek. He thought he heard Louisa's clear, light voice telling him: There is only right, or wrong.

I am not sure if we know which is which, he said. They have tried so hard to confuse us.

He shifted his packages from one arm to the other. Yet we are not a stupid people, he said, frowning; and we are not cowards. There have been heroes in our history; and there will be again.

And tides of passion and courage. Surely, such a tide will come in again, to fill our hearts. . . . May it come soon.

He topped a bare rise, and saw, for a moment, the Pamet valley spread out before him like a bowl of darkness cold with mist, with the few twinkling lights of Truro scattered among the hills. Look, he thought, how each house has its own bit of light, and how the night flows around them and between them.

The great beam of the lighthouse below the dark hill wheeled its spokes through the northern sky. What can I do? he thought; what can any of us do? There is so much darkness everywhere.

And Louisa's voice, low and clear:

"I think that God knows this," said Louisa.

Mr. Smith turned downward toward the river,



to where the low tide was moving out across the flats. The damp salt air came up to meet him.

“ I hope He does,” he said. “ I hope to God He does.”

CHAPTER

10

Mrs. Baghot sent Louisa a message by Meg, with a box of blueberries. "I thought you would like these," she wrote. "The hills are all over blue with them." Meg had added a small bunch of wilted daisies and clover, and three red roses from a climbing vine. She gave them to Louisa without a word, with round and solemn eyes like a deer's, half gentle, and half afraid.

And then she turned, and ran away, out of shyness, and because, after all, what were three roses against Genevieve? Two little boys, Arthur and Jacob Doane, her cousins, were waiting to row her back to the landing; fish meant more to them than either counts or princes, but they didn't mind looking at Louisa, the way they might have looked at a herring, or anything else thrown up on the beach. Jeri stood at his sister's side, and stared back at them; he wished they were friends of his, but they were not. As for Meg, she was on an errand for her aunt, and so, for Jeri, she was scarcely there at all. Children pass in and out of sight of each other; when the shadow of the grown-up world is upon them they become like the shadow-half of the moon, only faintly visible.

Louisa was delighted with the berries, and made up her mind to go berry picking too. She thought

she would ask Smith to go with her; she thought that an afternoon on the hills would be fun. "I will come also," said Jeri, "to hunt the bear."

"You will stay here," said Louisa firmly. She was not sure if there was a bear in Truro or not, for after all, this was a wild country; but if there was, she would rather that Jeri kept as far away from it as possible. And besides, she wanted to be alone — or, at least, away from the endless care of her little family; she wanted to be free, for a little while, for a few hours, from the daily cares. . . .

They took the road to the center, and then went on to the east, to where the land rolled up from the river onto the wide sweep of downs from which there was a view of ocean. Louisa carried a pail, and Mr. Smith a basket; he did not care about the berries, but he was happy to walk beside

her on the yellow-green slopes where the wind never stopped blowing, with the sea below like a field of cornflowers. The small hills stood up above the world; the little hollows with their piney woods lay beneath them, they were up under the sky, with only low bushes around them, and the wind and the bright sun. The slopes were quilted with the small, glossy leaves and dark twigs of the bearberry, the air smelled of thyme and sweet fern, and the fragrant, tundra-like moss crunched under their feet as they walked.

They found a great patch of berries, like a blue pool in the green fern and shrub, and half filled Louisa's pail, stooping among the low bushes, crushing the brittle leaves in their fingers, feeling the hot sun on their backs. Long before the patch was exhausted, they moved to another, lured on by distance, by other slopes to be explored.

Louisa's hair fell across her face, and she brushed it back with fingers stained with blueberries. "Oh," she cried, "what a lovely day."

In a circle of honey-colored grass, soft as silk, they lay down, and stared at the sky. The tops of the grasses waved above them; they could barely see each other, though they were close together. The arrowy light fell around them, and the gentle, sweet-smelling wind blew against their cheeks. They talked about themselves; about berries and hills, and sails, and the river; about Jeri, and childhood, about the college at Hyannis. It was the first long talk they had ever had together. In the east, above the ocean, a gray shadow of fog rose in the sky; but they did not see it.

"I am so happy," said Louisa.

"I think you are always happy," he said.

"No," she said; "I am not always. But it is so

peaceful here, on the hills; one thinks that sorrow is far away."

"As far as tomorrow?" he asked.

"Farther, even. As far as yesterday."

He raised himself on one arm, and looked down at her. "Tell me," he said; "why are you so much braver than I?"

She lay looking up at him, and past him, into the blue arch of air where a faint haze had begun to gather. "Am I?" she asked gently. "Perhaps it is because I have now so little left to lose. One can be brave, then."

"And I have so much?"

"Have you not?" she asked. "You have your country and your home; that is a great deal, so much that perhaps you do not even know how much it is. But what I have is dear to me, because it is so little."

He shook his head. "My country is dear to me, too," he said. "To all of us here."

"Well, then," she said; "perhaps you do not love enough."

He looked soberly out across the high, windy land, his fingers laced about his knees. "I wonder," he said. He thought of the great ages of the past, of the men whose passion had changed the world . . . of the great conquerors, the teachers, the saints and the martyrs, of Jesus and Cortez, of Attila and Galileo. . . .

"To love," he said, "or to hate; either one would do."

"No," she said.

The sun was less warm, and the wind, shifting, was coming off the sea. She rose to go; the pail, heavier now, swung at her side. "To hate," she said: "that is like Hitler, and the Germans. They

are not brave, they are daring and angry. Take from them the glory, and they would not seem brave any more.

“ I know them well, these Germans. They do not love their land, their country, as the English do. You will see, when they possess other lands, they will be glad to live in them. They will never love anything.”

Her voice broke. “ Not as we loved our home,” she said.

They were following a winding path down through thickets of scrub oak and pine, beach-plum and thorny vines. Where the brown needles of pine made a soft quilt across the ground, they stopped, out of the wind, alone in the sweet, still air. “ Where was your home, Louisa? ” he asked.

“ Did you not know? ” she asked. “ It was near Cracow. Our home was an old castle which had

belonged to my father's family for many centuries. It has all been smashed."

"And England?" he asked. "Your mother's home?"

"So you remember that," she said. It seemed to please her, and to surprise her, too. "There is nothing left for me in England now," she said. "My grandfather is dead; my cousins do not want me. I do not blame them; it is a small island, with few opportunities. There are many young women in England. Very few of them will be married, I think."

"Oh," he said.

"England," she went on dreamily; "and America. They are like yesterday and tomorrow. If one could choose . . . would you not choose to go forward, rather than to go back? Always, at home, we dreamed of America."

She sighed, stirring the dry, brown needles with her fingers. "Well," she said, "at all events, I am here." She looked up at him suddenly. "Now that your boat is nearly done," she said, "you will be going away again. Where was it you wished to go? To the Maine coast? I do not know where that is."

"Yes," said Mr. Smith absently. But a moment later he thought, am I really ready to leave? And all at once he felt worried, and sad.

"I shall miss you," said Louisa.

"Will you?" he said; and found that his throat had suddenly gone dry. "I am glad of that," he said, in a low croak.

"Well, naturally," she said simply. "I do not have many friends."

And she added,

"I know that Jeri will be sorry when you go. Already you are in his prayers each night."

Mr. Smith was startled; he stared at Louisa in alarm. The little grove of pines seemed pin-drop still; he could hear the quiet singing in his ears. He felt confused; he had a sense of an airy rush so swift that it took his breath away, but where it came from, or where it was going, he did not know. With a shaky laugh, he rose to his feet. "I am going to look for one last patch of berries," he said, "to fill our pail. I'll be back. You wait here."

He climbed back up the path, to get to the clear sun, and to have the wide, quiet view of the valley below him again. He did not notice the light fingers of mist which streamed past him, or the gray haze in the east, over the ocean shore. He had too much to think about besides — if one could say that he was thinking at all, or call the feathery trouble of his mind, thought.

It seemed to him as if a ghostly hand had been

laid upon him, to detain his spirit, to hold him back . . . but from what? What was it he had planned to do? and where had he expected to go? Somewhere — not just to the Maine coast, but beyond, to some escape and refuge; it was already doubtful in his mind. Was he happy, or unhappy? He did not know.

He stepped out onto the crest of the hill; and at the same moment the fog came down around him. Like a frosty torrent, it swept in from the east, blotting out the sky and the hills in an airy vapor. He stood in surprise, unable to see anything but mist around him; he could hear the foghorn at Highland Light calling rapidly, anxiously to the sea, mournful, and far away; and the small sound of the wind whining in the bushes at his feet. He was alone in the wet, gray air, with the earth far below him, out of sight. I must get back,

he thought; I must get down again, I must go back to the pine grove where I left Louisa.

He turned, looking for the path, but saw only the fog about him, drifting past in the wind. Which way had he come, he wondered. The land sloped downward behind him; he took a few steps in that direction, only to find himself thigh-deep in bushes, blundering between trees. Half seen and ghostly, they stretched around him, unfamiliar, telling him nothing. Am I lost? he thought; and without warning, felt a jolt of fright at his heart. I must get back to Louisa, he said; and called her name into the empty silence.

There was no answer. He waited, listening with all his might. He could hear his own heart beating, but that was all; he could see nothing, only the white, moving wall of fog, and the dim pines. "Louisa," he cried again.

In a sudden haste, he plunged downward through the branches, spilling berries from his basket. What drove him on, he did not know; he felt bereft, trapped by empty air. The thorns tore at his legs, and pine branches whipped their needles across his face. "Louisa," he cried; "where are you? "

"Louisa! "

He was in a thicket of blackberry vines, ringed round by the uncertain shapes of trees. She came through them out of the mist behind him, quiet as a deer. "Here I am," she said. And with a smile,

"I think that you were lost, Smith."

He stood sheepishly looking down at her, feeling the cold air strike through his damp clothes.

"Yes," he said finally; "I guess I was."

"It was the fog," said Louisa.



They went on down the hill together, holding the berry pail between them. The handle was hard and cold in their fingers; and her hand, where it touched his, was firm and cold, too.

CHAPTER

11

The wind turned again in the night, blowing the fog to sea. In the morning, a smoky sou'wester came roaring across the bay, piling the waves up on the beach, scattering spray and foam over the low dune grass. In the Truro hills the sound of the surf rolled and rumbled like distant freight trains, and Mrs. Baghot, in her kitchen, said to her niece, Meg,

“There’ll be plenty of wood on the beach now, for your friends.”

“They’re not my friends,” said Meg. “Only Jeri.” She crossed her fingers behind her back; maybe not even Jeri, for all she knew. “I wish,” she breathed . . .

“Leastways, you like them,” said Mrs. Baghot.

“Yes,” said Meg. “Don’t you?”

“I got a good, Christian feeling towards them,” said Mrs. Baghot, “but I don’t see what’s ahead.”

“It’s only July yet,” said Meg. She meant that there was still August and September, which was a long time for people to get to like other people.

“What’s that got to do with it?” asked Mrs. Baghot, polishing a glass, and holding it to the light to look for streaks. “What they going to do this winter?”

Oh, thought Meg . . . winter. Well, she’d be

nine by then, and grown up, and things would probably be different. "I guess I don't know," she said uncertainly. Besides, it didn't interest her.

"Well," said Mrs. Baghot. She gave a noisy sigh. "I guess they'll make out," she said. "But I don't know."

Meg spun about on her toes. When grown-ups talked like that, she couldn't understand what they meant. It was meaningless, like the sound of wind and water, or the sea gull's crying. To live was something anyone could do, unless they died of sickness, or got run over; food and shelter had always been there in the world, she had never thought to ask where they came from. No more than it occurred to her to wonder where Jeri and Louisa would live after they left the scow. . . . For a single wild moment she imagined them coming to live with her, in her house in Brockton; if

she asked her mother . . . ? But it was too unlikely a thought to hold on to for long; she put it away, for dreaming over.

She wandered around the kitchen, touching the pots and pans with restless fingers. There was a yellow light in the windows, not so much from the sun as from the wind. It was a day to be out in. "You want me for anything, Aunt Sarah?" she asked.

"Why no — I don't expect so. What you figuring to do?"

"Well," she said, "I thought I'd go down to the bay, and see how it looked."

Mrs. Baghot gave her a thoughtful glance. "What for you got on your good plaid dress?" she asked.

"Oh — this?" said Meg, looking innocently down at herself. "I guess it just got sort of put on."

“ You aiming to get yourself wet? ” asked Mrs. Baghot.

“ No’m.”

Mrs. Baghot picked up a bowl of butter, and set it in the ice box. “ Why don’t you go see your cousins? ” she asked. “ Arthur and Jacob.”

“ Oh, them,” said Meg.

“ What’s the matter with them? ”

“ They’re all the time fishing,” she said, “ and pushing me around.”

Mrs. Baghot sighed again. A child was a great one for mischief, indoors or out, and hard to keep out of trouble. “ All right, then,” she said. “ But don’t get yourself wet.”

It was a long walk to the bay, and then out over the sand and around the inlet by Cornhill to the outer beach. The wind all but pushed her over, she had to bend herself against it; and the sand

stung her legs, but when she got down closer to the water, it was hard and damp, and didn't blow so much. The waves were exciting, coming in fast and high, and foaming white; not as big as the ocean, but big enough so she could hardly see over them to the slate-colored, racing water beyond. She went on up the beach toward the river, watching the gulls trying to make headway against the wind, and being blown back in long swoops. She could see the *Thetis* ahead of her, up on the sand, beyond the river-mouth.

She was merely out for a walk; there wasn't anything she had to do. She could skip on the sand, if she wanted to; or look for shells, and seaweed. She thought that perhaps she'd go on for a ways, say to the end of the beach, and look out across the river to where the scow was; she didn't see what harm that would do. And then, if Jeri

happened to be over there, on the other side . . . well, she could wave to him, she supposed. It wasn't much, but it was something.

Though as it turned out, she didn't even have to look that far, for when she came through the long grass of the dunes onto the north bank, Jeri was already there below her, the old dory hauled half way up on the sand, and he himself happily absorbed in studying some object at his feet. She couldn't see it very well at first, what with the wind making her eyes water; it seemed to be a sort of platform of dark, wet boards, set up on some kind of barrels. Half of it was floating in the river, and the other half was up on the sand, like the dory.

"Hello," she said breathlessly, peering down at him from the bank; "what you got?"

He looked up at her with a glance of sober

delight. "Look," he said. "I found it."

She slid down through the grass, landing in a flurry of sand beside him. "What is it?" she asked.

"It is a raft," he said, in mysterious tones. "It came through the river, and went here. I found it, and now it is mine."

"Maybe it belongs to somebody," she said. "Maybe it's valuable."

"Oh no," he said quickly; "I do not think so." He looked about him anxiously. "It is just an old thing," he said loudly.

The trouble was, she thought so too. She was not very sea-minded; and yet, because he had found it, she wished to admire it. "Will it float?" she asked.

He pointed to the end in the water, riding on its empty barrels. "Some of it does," he said.



“ What about the other part? ”

“ I don’t know,” he said. “ We could push it off, and see.”

The two small bodies bent themselves into taut bows, shoving and tugging at the wet wood. “ It’s awful heavy,” said Meg. All at once she stopped, and stood up, struck by a new thought. “ If you push it out,” she said, “ and if all of it floats, it’ll float right on down the river, won’t it? ”

Jeri hadn’t thought of that. “ We could tie it up,” he said doubtfully.

“ With what? ”

He hadn’t thought of that, either. “ Well,” he said, “ I could go back to the scow, and get some string.”

“ I’ll come too,” said Meg boldly.

And she spun around on her toes, to hide how taken-aback she was at her own boldness.

They clambered into the dory together, and shoved off, having to battle wind and river current both at once. It took them a long time to get across to the opposite bank; Meg sat in the stern, with dreamy looks, while Jeri tugged at the oars, sometimes missing the fast flowing water altogether, which made the boat spin around like a top. They landed finally far upstream, and walked back along the shore. Meg waited, while he ran up into the cabin; when he returned, there was a bulge under his overalls.

“ Did you get some? ” she asked; and he nodded silently.

“ Let’s see.”

He took the rope out, and showed it to her. She drew in her breath in a low gasp. “ It’s a wash line,” she whispered. “ Dass you take it? ”

“ I can take anything I like,” he said proudly.

And he added, simply, " Anyway, Louisa was not looking."

The voyage back was easier, with the wind behind them, though they again landed far upstream, and had to walk back, Jeri dragging the dory after him through the shallows and counter-currents close to the shore, while Meg, in her good plaid dress, danced safely along the sand. They tied the wash line to the raft, and anchored it to an old dead tree on the bank; after which they tried to push the raft out into the stream. It slid a little way, and then stopped. " Let's not push it any further," said Meg.

" Why not? "

" Well," she said, not quite knowing, herself, " we could leave it like it is, and just make believe."

" But it would only be a dock then," said

Jeri, his eyes clouding over with storm.

“A dock is fun,” she said.

He stuck out his under lip, stubbornly. “I want it to be a boat,” he declared. “I have something I want to do in a boat.”

Oh then, my goodness, she thought irritably; just because you want it to be a boat, I suppose I got to push and push and push. . . .

But the little flame of rage did not last. How could she be angry at Jeri? Had she forgotten that he was her strange and lovely friend? Had she forgotten the way she felt about him — so sweet and mysterious? And then there was Genevieve; Genevieve wasn't there, to push and push . . . only herself, Meg. She could feel her little, chicken-like breast swell with something like joy, and something like triumph. Genevieve . . . oh, Genevieve.



“Come on,” she said.

“Push.”

The raft ground its way a few more inches across the sand. And then, all at once coming to pebbles, the barrels slid forward, the planks tilted downward, and, the sloping ground and the river current both conspiring to help, the whole slid forward with a rush, and bounced into the water, at the end of the wash line.

Meg went with it. Taken by surprise, off balance, and with her fingers caught between two planks, she splashed into the water up to her middle, before she could let go.

“Oh me,” she whispered. “Oh me.”

She came slowly back to the bank, her fine plaid skirt hanging heavy and dripping around her thin legs, her shoes squelching water with every step, and a look of utter disaster on her face. Jeri stood

looking at the raft, with his hands on his hips. "It floats," he declared.

She didn't answer; she climbed the bank, and left him without a word, walking back the way she had come, her dress dripping, her shoes full of sand and water, and her eyes slightly crossed with horror.

Mrs. Baghot put her to bed. There, after supper, she wrote to her mother in Brockton.

"Dear Mom,

I like it very much here, and we have a raft, it is not a dock. Could we ask a count and countess for the winter. I will not catch a cold like Aunt Sarah says, because the water was warm. It is very windy here.

Sincerely,

Your loveing daughter,

Meg."

CHAPTER

12

Mr. Smith had a lot to think about; and he was curiously unwilling to start in. For one thing, he was not at all sure where it would lead him. Here he was, not too well off for comfort, no more than fifty miles from where he had started; more than half the summer still lay ahead, the green, balsam-fragrant shores, the deep blue waters of the north were waiting for him . . . and he found himself

reluctant to leave. It was so peaceful where he was (he told himself); life was so simple; the lazy mornings on the beach, the swimming, the walks in the hills, the long, quiet evenings, alone by himself. . . .

Not altogether alone, though; for after all, there was Louisa. In his mind's eye, he saw her golden hair, and her brown eyes, now light as amber, now dark as rain; and he thought of her pride as he had seen it, sharp and bright as a bird. She has more courage than I, he thought, and yet she is young enough to be my daughter. Perhaps that is why — perhaps she is too young to be troubled for very long. But in that case I must seem to her old enough to be her father.

He experienced a pang in his heart at this thought, which he felt placed him in a disagreeable light. And he said to himself, angrily, After

all, I do not have to be young, in order to talk sensibly to a young woman.

But then he remembered Louisa's cool, firm hand next to his on the pail handle, and the gentle way she had laughed at him in the fog, and he exclaimed with a groan,

“What a fine picture I must have made of myself.”

And he decided to stay away from Louisa for a while.

But the wind, blowing all day straight on the beach, tired him out; and in the afternoon, he came walking slowly up the shore, to get out of it. So he found himself at the scow again.

She was sitting in the sand on the far side, cutting Jeri's hair. The tiny, hay-colored wisps sailed off in the wind, over the river, as she snipped, peered anxiously at what was left, and then bent



to cut again. Jeri's expression was patient, but stern; he had an air of being kept from great things by the most mouselike events. The moment he saw Mr. Smith, however, his whole expression changed.

He did not bother with the usual greetings. "I have a raft," he said at once. "It is very big and perfect; and it floats at both ends."

Mr. Smith tried to look properly impressed. "A raft," he exclaimed; "well, that's fine."

"And I know what I am going to do with it," said Jeri. There was a secret look on his face.

At this moment his sister put her hand on top of his head, and pushed it hard to one side. "Don't," he cried. And he pushed it as hard as he could in the opposite direction.

"Jeri," she exclaimed in despair, "I cannot see what I am doing, if you move about so."

“ I am going to make a great boat out of my raft,” said Jeri, with his head bent, and looking up at Mr. Smith from under his eyebrows. It seemed as though he wanted to tell him all he could, without telling him his secret.

“ Then I had better teach you how to sail,” said Mr. Smith.

The boy opened his mouth, and drew in a long, quavering breath. He could hardly believe it; what glory, and what a surprise. “ Louisa,” he cried; “ did you hear? Smith is going to teach me how to sail.”

“ That will be very nice,” said Louisa.

“ When, Smith? Soon? Today? Now? ”

“ The boat isn’t even in the water yet,” said Mr. Smith.

With the scissors poised in the air like a stork’s beak, Louisa surveyed her handiwork. The haircut

was a little lopsided, due to the wind, and there was one spot where she had obviously cut too much off; but on the whole, she thought it an improvement over what had been there before. "All right," she said, giving Jeri a little shove, "you can go now. That is the best I can do."

He wriggled out from under her hands, eager, relieved, and full of plans for himself. "Would you care to see my raft?" he asked hopefully. "It is on the other side of the river."

Mr. Smith looked over at the windy side of the river, and sighed. "Well," he began; but Louisa came to his rescue. "Run along," she said to her brother. "I have had enough of you."

"But Louisa," he insisted, "I do think that he would like to see . . ."

"Run along, Jeri." When she spoke like that, he knew she meant it. He went slowly down the

shore, peering into the shallows for crabs, and occasionally giving a small jump, or hop, out of disappointment, or by way of exercise. Louisa watched him until he was hidden by a bend in the river. Then she turned her grave glance on Mr. Smith.

“You are not going at once to Maine?” she asked.

“No,” he said uncomfortably. “I guess not.”

“But you are going soon?”

“Well, no,” he said; “no.” And then, all at once, blurting it out like a schoolboy,

“I am not going at all.”

“So,” she said slowly; “not at all.” And she turned away with what almost looked like a smile.

“Are you glad?” he asked.

She looked at him innocently. “Of course,” she said. “Now you will teach Jeri to sail.”

“And is that all?” he asked. “For no other reason?”

She looked away, and he thought that her cheeks grew a little pink. “What you do,” she said at last, slowly, “is for your own self. Everybody . . . I have learned that much. If I am glad, or not glad, it is for reasons like that, too.

“What other reasons would there be?”

“Oh,” he said. He was taken aback, and felt confused, for he had expected a different kind of answer. He wasn’t even sure if he knew what she meant; she might have been a little more enthusiastic, he thought . . . hadn’t she said she’d miss him, up there in the pines? But that was the trouble, he kept forgetting. . . . Why should she miss him at all?

She is too young to be sad for very long, he thought.

And with a light laugh, or what he hoped would be one, he remarked,

“What difference does it make?”

She sat quite still, looking down at her hands, half buried in the sand. He does not want to stay, she thought; he is doing it out of kindness only. His own life is far away, with freedom and happiness. . . .

“Yes,” she said in a low voice, “it does not make any difference.”

All at once he wanted to hurt her, and to hurt himself at the same time. “Would you rather I went away,” he asked gently, “and didn’t bother you any more?”

What did he mean, not bother her any more? He heard her draw in a sharp breath. “Have I said something I should not have?” she whispered, “that you should say such things to me?”

“ How could you bother me? ”

Mr. Smith's cheeks burned; and he murmured, looking down,

“ I don't know.”

They sat for a long time without saying anything. Mr. Smith felt ashamed; he felt as if he were the one who was young, not Louisa; and like someone falling, reaching out to something firm to hold to, “ I hope I do not bother you,” he said at last; “ because I like you.”

There; he had said it, before he had even had time to think about it. She did not let him see how much it surprised her. “ I like you, too,” she said simply. “ So that is why I did not understand.”

The gull's flight is not more airy than the heart of man. From as low as Mr. Smith's feelings had lain in his bosom, they now bounced proportion-

ally high. He laughed from joy, and from embarrassment, and remarked,

“ Well, that’s good.”

He did not expect that, thought Louisa in bewilderment. He did not think that I would like him. But on the other hand — how can he possibly like me? It is more probably pity, but I should be grateful for that, too, in any case. . . .

And she laughed also, only more politely.

To Jeri, returning from his excursion along the shore, the two grown-ups presented a puzzling sight. They were sitting on the sand where he had left them; and they were not saying anything at all. Only, now and then, one of them would smile a little uncertainly, as though he thought he ought to say something, and didn’t know what.

CHAPTER

13

Two days later, the moon coming full, the *Thetis* was launched at noon on a high course tide which flooded the beach in that vicinity. Mr. Smith made an occasion of it, and invited Mr. and Mrs. Baghot and their niece to a picnic, along with Jeri and Louisa. He built a fire, on which to grill the hamburgers Mrs. Baghot had ordered for him from George Dutra in North Truro; there was coffee for the grown-ups, milk for the children, and

a tossed salad from Louisa, as her share of the party. Mrs. Baghot, stepping warily and unaccustomed on the sand, appeared in her next-to-best black dress; Meg was in her plaid, which had been freshly starched; while Louisa and Jeri were in their overalls, as usual.

“ Shall we float her off before or after lunch? ” Mr. Smith asked Mr. Baghot, when they had all assembled.

“ Way I look at it, is this,” replied Mr. Baghot. “ Once she’s in, you’ll want to be out there, seeing she don’t take in too much water. Besides,” he added, “ tide won’t be high for another hour.

“ Them hamburgers are the best Mrs. Baghot could get. Real top round.”

So they had their lunch first, sitting around the fire, although it was a warm day, and trying to keep the smoke from getting into their eyes. “ I

haven't done anything like this, ever since I can remember," said Mrs. Baghot. "Not since I was a girl, almost."

"Just think," said Louisa. "And with all this lovely water so near."

"That's just it," said Mrs. Baghot; "you get so's you don't notice it any more. Now, it's real nice out here, but I never would have thought twice about it."

She held her hamburger gingerly at arm's length, away from her second-best dress. "I expect it must be close to fifteen years since I was swimming in the sea," she said wistfully.

"That's a fact," said Mr. Baghot. "When you see water around you summer and winter, you don't feel the same about it. It don't give you the surprise."

He pointed to the bay, with his coffee cup.

“ I’ve seen that water out there,” he said, “ in sun and rain, and in wind that would frighten you. I’ve seen men drownt in it. There was a storm one winter about ten years ago, caught some of the fishing dories out in it. Well, there was one belonged to a man over to Provincetown — I don’t recollect his name. He was coming in, off Wood’s End, when his canvas broke on him. One minute he was riding through the waves, and the next, he was at the bottom. Cover just ripped clear apart. Went into a wave, and never did come out of it.

“ You see a thing like that, and you lose your taste for swimming.”

“ Did you see it, Uncle Alfred? ” asked Meg, with round eyes.

“ No,” said Mr. Baghot. “ I didn’t need to see it.”

“ They say the salt water is good for rheuma-

tism," said Mrs. Baghot, " but I don't know." She laughed shyly. " I might try wading, a speck."

Louisa leaned over, and laid her cool, young hand on Mrs. Baghot's arm. " After lunch," she said, " we will go down the beach, and wade together, while the men are launching the boat."

Mrs. Baghot colored with confusion. " Well, my land," she said; " I don't know . . . I declare . . .

" I suppose it wouldn't kill me.

" Fact is," she said a little later, as they made their way down the beach and modestly out of sight, " I expect we get too used to our blessings. Seems as if there was no end of them, when we're young; and they're over before we know it."

" They go," said Louisa gravely, " and they come. I did not think that I would have any blessings ever again; but I was wrong."

Mrs. Baghot waded in the water, holding up her skirts, and gazing out to sea with a bold and serious expression. The children splashed about in the shallows, up to their knees; and Mr. Smith and Mr. Baghot put rollers underneath the boat cradle, and eased the *Thetis* down into the water. "She'll likely take in some damp," said Mr. Baghot, "till the seams swell up." But actually only a few drops came in.

Mr. Smith trod the deck of his ship, which floated in two feet of water, and felt free and happy. Now he was no longer a castaway on a beach; he could come and go as he pleased across the level floor of ocean . . . at least, as far as Provincetown, and back. There were still some arrangements to be made, however. "Look," he said to Mr. Baghot, "I can't anchor here, on a lee shore. What would you advise?"

“ Well, no,” Mr. Baghot agreed, “ you can’t; first sou’wester would blow you up on the beach again. You’d do better up river, in the bight. Couldn’t get in or out except at high tide, but you’d sleep easier.”

“ What I need,” said Mr. Smith, “ is a dinghy of my own.”

“ Manuel Furtado could sell you one,” said Mr. Baghot, “ over to Provincetown. That is, if he has any.”

“ Good,” said Mr. Smith. “ I’ll go and see. And then, when I come back, you think I can sail right up the river? ”

“ Be high tide and full moon tonight,” said Mr. Baghot. “ You keep over to the far bank coming in, till you get to the little island off the town landing; and then you turn sharp right, and come into the bight, and anchor off John Worthington’s

boat, the *Bocage*. The breeze'll be just about right, and you shouldn't have any trouble.

"You figure to use this cradle for anything?"

"No," said Mr. Smith.

Mr. Baghot carefully hauled the cradle back onto the beach again, to use the wood for something else, while Mr. Smith, rejoicing to feel the deck rolling under him once more, went over his lines, stays, sheets, and halyards, to make sure that everything was in order.

Not long after that, the Baghots went home, Sarah with a pink trace of sunburn on her face, and Meg with her plaid skirt wet again, but as she said, only a little, and you'd hardly notice. Mr. Smith, working the *Thetis* out to where he could get the center-board down, took Louisa and Jeri aboard, and headed north by west, to where the low roofs of Provincetown stood out like a smudge



across the bay. The sun shone yellow-gold on the water, the sky was cloudless, and the air clear as well-water, with a steady south-west breeze. Mr. Smith let Jeri sail the boat; who, in a haze of joy, gripped the tiller with both hands, and peered ahead with an unrelenting air at the blue and shining, empty water. "This is the way I will sail across the sea," he exclaimed, "on my raft."

Mr. Smith paid no attention to this remark. But Louisa gave her brother a quick look, and shook her head, as though to say, Do not talk like that.

Toward five o'clock they passed the bell off Long Point, the narrow spit of sand, and the light-house, and rounded in toward the harbor. A fishing dory came chugging up behind them, with a fan of sea-gulls crying in the air above it, and Louisa clapped her hands with delight. "Look,

Smith," she cried; "the birds — how beautiful."

And she waved happily to the fisherman as he went by.

Taking over the tiller from Jeri, Mr. Smith set his course, as Mr. Baghot had told him, toward the west end of town. Gulls were everywhere, on the nets, in the water, in the air, and lined up along the fish wharf like gray, old men. The weirs laced the harbor with their nets, and the *Thetis* threaded her way between them, past dories moored at their poles.

Mr. Furtado himself rowed out to meet them, bringing them in across the flats. After a small dinghy had been inspected and approved, Mr. Smith asked him to look over the *Thetis*, and to lash a new lanyard to the forestay which had come loose when she drove in against the sand. "You're lucky," said Mr. Furtado, "I'm not too busy.

When you want me to do it? Tomorrow? Next week? "

" Now," said Mr. Smith.

" Now? " echoed Mr. Furtado. And, taken by surprise, he declared,

" All right, all right. You come back in two hours."

They walked through the narrow streets, under the elm and willow shadows, to the restaurant at the foot of the town wharf. The streets seemed hot and close after the airy beaches of Truro, crowded and jostling with people. The secret, closed faces, hungry for pleasure, or tight with dislike, the motors streaming by, the heavy air smelling of gasoline and popcorn and fish, all served to depress and frighten Louisa, who withdrew into herself, and replied to Mr. Smith's efforts at conversation with a timid smile. Only Jeri ap-

peared unmoved by the hurly-burly around him; he walked along proudly, with a sort of nautical roll, or stood with his nose pressed against the shop windows which were full of toys, souvenirs, postcards, and jewelry.

It was dusk when they got back to the boat. The harbor lay before them, the old, dull blue of summer evening, with Long Point flashing yellow across the water, and the white beam of Highland Light wheeling above the hills. Already, in the east, water and land were lost to view in the loom of night. A fishing boat lay at anchor, a vague form in the blue, evening air, her riding light clear as a star above the shadowy ripples. Louisa took a long breath, and looked about her. "Oh, I am glad to be here again," she said.

High above them, the sail reached into the air, bellying out, making a faint hum in the wind. The

boat slipped through the water with a quiet whisper, leaving a hiss behind; and round and full, the orange moon rose in the east, above the Truro shore. It laid a thin line of silver fire along the tops of the dunes, and threw a snowy light across the deck, and on Louisa's face, as she lay back with her head on Mr. Smith's shoulder.

The night spread out wider and wider around them, empty and still, shadowy and cold. Jeri, in the cabin, was already asleep; and Mr. Smith thought that Louisa was sleeping, too. Her eyes were closed, but her face was no longer that of a young girl; in the moonlight it was ageless, serene, womanly, and tender. And Mr. Smith, with one hand on the tiller, looked down at her, and tried not to move, so as not to disturb her.

He was sad; but it was a sorrow that was full of sweetness. It seemed to him that in all the

world, he was alone, that on all the land and sea, only he was watching. And what he was watching was the world's beauty, the beauty of the calm bay, and the moon-fired hills, and of the longing in his own heart. But now this longing had gathered itself around Louisa, and all the beauty seemed only a part of his feeling for her.

I am in love with her, he thought suddenly; and felt his heart contract with surprise, and with fright.

He lifted his face to the sky. I do not have to ask her to be in love with me, he said. That would be too foolish. I am not apt to be attractive to her — a man of my age, a school teacher. . . . To be in love with her is bad enough, without having her feel sorry for me, besides. If she were a friend, perhaps — but actually we are strangers to each other; I do not even know whom she is dreaming of.

And he thought dejectedly of all the people in Louisa's life, none of whom he knew.

Louisa was not asleep; she stirred against him, and murmured,

“ I am cold, Smith.”

He brought a blanket from the cabin, and wrapped it around her. “ It is so beautiful out here on the sea,” she said, looking up at him. “ I have never known anything so beautiful.”

He smiled down at her. Their faces drew close; if he had been younger, he would have kissed her, or she would have kissed him. Instead, he remarked,

“ Are you warm enough? ”

“ Yes,” she said. And patting the bench beside her,

“ Come, sit here with me.”

They sat side by side, watching the moon-path

on the water ahead. "When it is like this," said Louisa, "I am so happy, I do not feel any worry for the future. That is not so sensible, perhaps. Today, in the city, I was suddenly afraid. There are so many people in this country; they will squeeze me to death."

"No," he said; and to himself, I could not bear it.

"I am happy," she said, "when I am able. But when people are kind to me, I cannot give them anything in return. That saddens me."

"You do not have to give people anything in return for kindness," he declared.

She looked at him gravely. "You do not understand," she said. "I use other people's kindness for myself. I am only selfish, for I have nothing to give them back."

The cold night air flowed about his heart, chill-

ing it; he could feel it grow smaller in his breast. What was she trying to tell him? That she had nothing to give?

“Nothing?” he asked, thinking, She has said no, before I have even spoken.

She leaned closer to him. “Nothing,” she answered. But in her heart, she cried, Do not believe me.

“You do not have to give me anything,” he said steadily. “No one asks you to.”

She thought: he does not kiss me, or take my hand. He believes, then, that I have really nothing . . . that I am of no value. . . .

And she stared ahead, biting her lip, and shivering inside the blanket.

They were both silent, drawing near the river, through which the incoming tide poured in a black and soundless current. He thought that she



had warned him not to expect anything from her; and she thought that he was kind to her because he felt sorry for her. But she had already given him her heart; and he was not sorry for anyone except himself.

CHAPTER

14

Mr. Smith sat alone on the deck of the *Thetis*, anchored in the bight. His head was sunk upon his hands; he was thinking that he had almost made a fool of himself, and he believed that the heaviness of his heart was due to this cause. He tried to review the situation with a clear mind; he remembered that he was a teacher, and he placed

the facts before himself to the best of his ability.

Here he was, a middle-aged man, with a small income and a by no means certain future, in love with a young woman about whom he knew next to nothing at all. Still, he thought, that was not, perhaps, the most important thing: what was important was the evident fact that she did not want anything from him, except the sort of friendly help he had so far been able to give her — such as it was. As for love — she had all but told him that it was out of the question. He did not blame her for that; in fact, he had never expected anything else. To the boys and girls in his classes at the college, he knew that he seemed already practically in the grave; and Louise was no older than they were.

Yet his heart ached; and he said to himself that

even if he wished to be helpful to her in a friendly way, he knew all too well how little he had to offer.

It seemed to him now that there was no longer anything to be gained by staying in Truro. I am worse off than before, he thought, because where I had the whole world to run away from, now I must run away from myself. I should have gone to Maine in the first place; then this would never have happened. The best thing for me would be to sail tomorrow with the tide.

But in his heart, filled with longing, with the beauty of the night, and with his own sorrow, he thought: I would like to see her once more . . . in a day or two . . . to say Goodbye.

And Louisa, lying under a quilt of moonlight on her bed, also thought that she would run away. "No," she cried into her clenched fists, "I will

not be an object of charity to anyone — least of all to the one I love. Yet to be with him day after day, and not to speak . . . to feel always the kindness and the pity . . . I could not bear it.

“ Even if it is better here for Jeri, I will go back to New York again. Perhaps I will be able to find some work there now; or the committee will help me again. That is what they are for, they do not have to love me.”

Her mood changed; and she reflected desolately that a penniless and homeless waif could not expect to be anything but an object of charity. Not even the Countess Louisa Barents-Czarnowitz. My dowry is a pail of blueberries, she thought; I have nothing to bring to my husband but grief and trouble.

And for the first time, she let herself think of her father; she let her fear and her loneliness sweep

over her, and she exclaimed: "If you were here, you would tell me what to do. You would understand my anguish, and you would help me, as you used to do, when I fell and hurt myself. Why did you have to leave me? Why did you have to die? I am too young for this: comfort me now, for a moment."

She thought she heard her father's voice, speaking to her in the language of her childhood. "Little cabbage," he said, "I would have had to leave you some day. Death is not a scratch, or a bumped knee, to be smoothed away with a kiss. But to die is not the worst thing, for it is soon over; while to run away, is never over. When the Germans came, I did not run away. I was not victorious, but at the end it was a comfort to know that neither you nor Jeri would ever need to be ashamed of me. I did not want to die; I did not want to leave you;

I did the best I could. I think that you will do your best, because you are like me."

A tear rolled down her face, onto Mrs. Baghot's blanket. Maybe I will wait one more day, she thought.

And because Jeri had fallen asleep without saying his prayers, she folded her hands in the darkness, and said them for him, and for the two of them:

"God bless our father and mother in heaven among the angels; and Jeri, and Louisa.

"And let us remember the heroes of our country, who died that others might live, who were strong and proud like Jeri will be; but may he also be a little like President Roosevelt, and President Abraham Lincoln.

"And help me not to run away, so that I will not shame my father, as he did not shame me.

“ And also Smith. Amen.”

She remained silent, thoughtful and reverent, her hands still folded below her chin. “ If it is impossible for him to love me,” she said presently, “ I will accept this fate, but if anything can be done, blessed Saint Antoni assist me.”

She slept, while the cold moon sailed across the western sky, and the late dew fell. She dreamed, neither of her father nor of Smith, but of the sea-gulls which had followed the fishing boat into Provincetown harbor. High, white, and proud they sailed in the pure air, above the clear sea, on angled wings. She could hear them in the sky above her, their cold, harsh voices in the wind. “ They are crying,” she said in her dream; “ it is the sea-gull cry.” And although she wept for them, she was comforted.

But all the next day, she stayed near the scow,

and Mr. Smith remained on board the *Thetis*, which was anchored upstream, in the bight.

And that same afternoon across the river, on the opposite shore, Jeri and Meg were busy around the raft. Jeri had found an old broomstick, washed up on the beach; and he was trying to make a hole in the planks, in which to make it stand. Meg's contribution was half a ball of heavy twine, which Jeri assured her was very valuable. "We will need that to hold the mast up," he declared.

She was happy; she felt herself to be useful, and appreciated. "I can get you more string if you want," she said. "I can ask my Uncle Alfred."

"I don't think we need any more," said Jeri. "What we need now . . ."

He dropped his voice to a serious whisper. "What we need," he said, "is a sail."

“ Well, we haven’t got anything would do,” said Meg, looking around.

“ Maybe you could ask your aunt for something,” he said hopefully.

“ Like what? ”

“ Like a sheet or something,” he said.

She looked at him in horror. “ You mean a sheet right off a bed? ” she asked.

Yes, that was what he meant. “ No,” said Meg. “ Not ever.”

“ But anyway,” he said, “ you could ask.”

She shook her head. She would have died for Jeri, or at least suffered a good bump, but that would not get him a sheet from her Aunt Sarah. “ No,” she said; “ she never would.

“ Whatever you want a sheet for? ”

He glanced about him, to be sure that no one was listening. “ I am going to sail across the

ocean," he announced. "To get the children."

Meg stood and stared at him with her mouth open. "You can't sail across the ocean in a raft," she said.

"Why not?" he demanded. "It floats very well."

And he added with simple confidence,

"It is a very good raft, I think."

"Well," she began, shaken . . .

"I am a very good sailor," said Jeri.

How big was the ocean? She had no idea. How long was a day, how far away was a mile? A mile was as far as she could go . . . a day could be as long as her whole life. And the ocean . . . it was smaller than the sky, anyway.

"You going all alone?" she asked, trembling.

He smiled at her suddenly, like sun on wheat; and her heart all but melted in her breast. "Would

you like to come with me?" he asked.

She couldn't speak; she only nodded, with a lump in her throat.

"Don't tell anybody," he said.

"About the sheet," she began . . .

"Maybe I could snitch one."

And aghast at what she had said, she put her hand across her mouth, as though to keep the evil words from flying back in again, and choking her.

"That would be very fine," said Jeri. He did not go into it; it was her affair, how she got it. His business was to do the great labors, to step the mast, to raise the sail, to rig the twine into stays, sheets, and halyards — (to try, also, to remember what they were) . . . and to get to England and back. He was not quite sure where it was, but on clear days, he had seen a blue cloud of land in the west. That was not England; but it was probably

out there somewhere, in the other direction. It would take several days, he thought.

“ We’d better have something to eat,” he said.

“ I shall bring some bread, and some cheese.”

“ What shall I bring? ” asked Meg. Already part of the plan, she spoke in a mysterious whisper.

“ Sardines,” said Jeri at once.

“ And a bottle of milk,” he added.

“ And some strawberries.”

Meg went home with her thoughts whirling in her head, like dry leaves in a storm. At supper she said to Mr. Baghot,

“ Uncle Alfred, could you sail across the ocean in a raft? ”

“ Well,” said Mr. Baghot, spearing a piece of sausage on the end of his fork, “ it’s been done. Sea’s been sailed across in every kind of a vessel, I expect. You aiming to try? ”



“ Oh no,” said Meg, swallowing.

“ Well, I wouldn’t,” he said. “ Liable to get yourself wet.”

She turned to her aunt in a polite way. “ Do you like sardines, Aunt Sarah?” she asked. “ And strawberries?”

“ Not special,” said Mrs. Baghot. “ Why?”

“ I was just wondering,” said Meg, “ on account of I didn’t see any in the kitchen when I was looking.”

And seeing that her aunt was regarding her strangely, she added with what she hoped was a friendly and innocent air,

“ We eat a lot of sardines at home.”

“ Then Emily’s changed some, since I knew her,” said Mrs. Baghot shortly. “ She never could abide them.”

“Yes ma’am,” said Meg. “She abides them now.”

“Strawberries are out of season,” said Mrs. Baghot.

Well, that left only the milk.

That night, in her little room under the eaves, Meg made a bundle of the clothes she meant to take along. There were not many: her bathing suit, a sweater for warmth, and the plaid dress, in case she went anywhere. Then she sat down to compose a letter of farewell to her mother.

“Dear Mom,” she wrote:

“I am going to England. I am going with Jeri on a raft. I will write you when I get there. I took one of Aunt Sarah’s sheets but I will try to bring it back. Maybe I will see the king and Queen but I will always remember I am an American girl



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and do not care about them. I am not wearing my
plaid because Uncle Alfred said I would libel to
get wet.

Your loveing daughter,
Meg.”

CHAPTER

15

She meant to creep out early in the morning, but although she woke at seven, her aunt was up before her. Since it was then too late to get the milk out of the ice-box without being seen, or her bundle from the house, she descended the stairs openly, in slow and solemn jumps, as though it were an ordinary day, like any other. And so, like any other day, she was given the ordinary things

to do, such as tidying up, dish-wiping, and errands, along with a certain amount of moral instruction. "The trouble with the young folks today," Mrs. Baghot told her, "is they've got no get-up-and-go to them. When I was your age, I was busy morning and night. Sundays, I used to freeze the ice cream in the freezer for two solid hours, rain or shine. Things don't taste like they used to."

"No ma'am," said Meg.

"Don't drop that plate," said her aunt. "We were great ones for picnics. Once every summer we'd all pile into Grandpa Doane's carry-all, and drive out to Long Nook beach. Took near a day there and back, over the old roads, the way they were. All sand. My, oh my. Well, I don't know as we're so much better off, except for the mosquitoes."

“ Yes ma’am,” said Meg.

“ Seems like yesterday,” said Mrs. Baghot.

“ Here — hand me that glass. You call that clean? ”

“ No ma’am,” said Meg.

Oh Jeri, Jeri, wait for me . . .

“ Your mother,” said Mrs. Baghot, “ Emily, my sister, she always knew her own mind. She was a great one for wanting to travel. I mind me one time she laid right down on the floor and kicked with her feet, because your grandpa wouldn’t let her go to Eastham.” Struck by a sudden doubt, she glanced at Meg out of the corner of her eye. Now why did I go and tell her that? she thought.

And she added uncertainly,

“ I’m all the time asking her to come down here for a visit, but she says she don’t like to go so far.”

She sighed, and spread the dish towel out to dry.
 "It wasn't no more than yesterday you couldn't keep her home," she said.

It was afternoon before Meg got back to the river and the raft. "I couldn't come before," she explained breathlessly, "because Aunt Sarah was there. So when she went to the Red Cross, I came.

"I ran some of the way," she added modestly.

But Jeri did not care. "Look," he said in a proud voice. And he showed her a small flounder, dry, dead, and sandy.

"I caught it," he told her. "We will take it with us."

And he added anxiously,

"Did you bring the sardines?"

His face fell when he learned that there were no sardines, but he cheered up again at sight of the

broad, white sheet. "That will make a splendid sail," he declared. "Only I am not sure how to put it on. I shall have to think about it."

"You could tie it in front," said Meg helpfully, "and sort of hold the ends of it."

"Yes," said Jeri. "I expect we shall have to do something like that."

They rigged the sheet into a sort of main-royal, with bits of twine; it had a tendency to droop over the foredeck of the raft, and into the water, but Jeri pointed out that with the wind behind them, it would probably hold itself up in the air. "The tide will be going out soon," he said, casting a sailor's eye at the river.

"How you going to steer?" she asked.

He gazed at her blankly. "Oh," he said.

"Well . . .

"I expect I shall think of something."

“ You could take an oar from the dory,” she said.

The sheet fluttered, the raft pulled gently against its mooring. The sun moved slowly westward; and the children sat together on the shore, waiting for the tide to turn. They were quiet, and calm; Jeri sat with his hands clasped about his knees, and Meg built herself a garden in the sand. A warm breeze blew from the southeast, and the terns rose against it; out on the bay the gulls coasted south over the water. The river grew still; almost unseen, the full, deep tide turned out again; and the raft swung in a slow circle. “ Well,” said Jeri, taking a deep breath, “ it is time, I guess.”

Meg looked at him with round and startled eyes. “ Is it? ” she breathed. “ You mean we’re going now? ”

“ You do not have to go,” he declared.

But Meg had burned her bridges behind her. The sheet, and the milk . . . and the letter to her mother . . .

“ I guess I had better go,” she said.

Loosed from its mooring, the raft nudged gently out into the current, made a half circle, steadied itself, and with the wind bellying the fat sheet, moved downstream toward the river mouth. They stood together on the worn planks of the deck, holding each other’s hand, watching the shore go by; it seemed to Meg that it was going by very fast. Her heart was beating hard. I guess I’m scared, she thought. But then she remembered Genevieve. She’d never do what I am doing, she said to herself; and felt proud and happy.

Jeri was looking anxiously toward the scow. He had forgotten that Louisa might see him. All he

could do was hope, and try to hide as much as possible behind the sail.

But Louisa did not see him. She was lying on her bed in the cabin, with her face hidden in her arms. She didn't see the raft go by in the current. No one saw it.

At the river mouth, just off the rocks, where the channel narrowed, the current had set up a rip. There the raft, entering the waves, bobbed up and down in a decided manner, the sheet flapped about, and the children, thrown off balance, clung to each other with frightened faces. "Oh me," said Meg. "Oh me.

"Are we sinking, Jeri?"

"Not yet," he answered.

"And anyway," he added, "I can swim a little."

A moment later the raft shot out of the rip into quiet water, and with the sail pulling again, moved

slowly off from shore. And Meg, whose legs suddenly felt weak, sat down on the deck, onto which a little water had splashed. "I'm glad that's over," she said. "I didn't like it."

The raft moved quietly northwestward, before the gentle southeast breeze. The sun drew nearer to the horizon, and the air filled with dusty golden light. Night rose like smoke in the east, the air along the west turned rosy, and then melon-green; an early star winked silver in the sky. Far off to starboard, but still ahead, the lights of Provincetown shone low across the water. It was chilly, and Meg shivered, "Do you think maybe we better eat our supper now?" she asked.

"Yes," said Jeri. "I think we better."

They ate some of the bread and drank some of the milk, leaving enough for breakfast. Then they sat still, watching the night come up behind them.

The day was all but gone; only a faint, luminous glow lingered in the west. "Tell me what we'll do," said Meg, "when we get there."

"I do not know exactly," said Jeri. "I expect we shall fetch the children, and come home again."

She looked around her, at the small square deck a foot or so above the water. "There won't be much room for them," she said.

"Well, no," he admitted. "I am afraid not. But perhaps for one or two."

She leaned over, and put her mouth down close to his ear. "Promise me something," she whispered.

"Promise me you won't ask Genevieve."

It made no difference to him, really; it was the voyage that mattered. "I will not ask her," he said, "if you would rather not."



She drew a long breath. She had disposed of Genevieve; now she could face England.

Night grew upon the sea, darkness came slowly down, the lights of shore shone brighter, but farther away. Above them, the air moved through the sky with a gentle and mysterious force, with a sound of night. The little craft drifted on across the empty waters, into the deepening dusk. Wind and current carried it onward; now and then it bobbed a little in the waves.

The night was gentle and kind, but cold; the great moon rose behind them, over Cornhill; and the dew fell. The two children lay down to sleep, close together, under the coat that Jeri had brought with him. Their arms were about each other, and their breath mingled in a faint mist above their heads. They said goodnight to each other.

“ Will we be in England soon? ” asked Meg.

“ I think so, perhaps,” said Jeri.

“ Well,” said Meg, “ goodnight.”

And she thought to herself, I expect Aunt Sarah is wondering where I am.

She had a moment's doubt, a moment's disquiet. I suppose she'll be angry, she thought. I expect I'll catch it when I get home.

But after all, her Mom was like that, too. She had kicked her feet; Aunt Sarah had said so.

“ Goodnight, Meg,” said Jeri. “ I am glad that you came with me.”

She closed her eyes; her mouth turned upward in a smile. “ I am, too,” she said.

And in a dutiful voice, but wholly as an afterthought, she added,

“ Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep;



If I should die before I wake.
I pray the Lord my soul to take.
Amen.”

And Jeri, in muffled tones, with his face against
her mouse-brown hair, added,
“ Blessed Saint Casimir watch over us.”

CHAPTER

16

It was close to seven o'clock when Mrs. Baghot, wondering why she had not seen Meg anywhere, went upstairs, and found the letter addressed to her sister. She would not, ordinarily, have read it, but the circumstances seemed unusual, and after holding it in her hand for a moment, and finding the flap not tightly sealed, she opened it. She did not take it seriously at first; but then she

suddenly thought of her sister Emily as a child, and remembered the questions Meg had asked at table the night before. "Land of stars," she said to herself, "what's that child up to now?"

And hurrying downstairs as fast as she could, she showed the letter to her husband.

"Now Sarah," he said; "where's your good sense? They're playing around the river, and have forgot to come home."

"Maybe so," she said. "But it's past her supper time, and Emily would never forgive me, if anything happened to her daughter."

"You go on down there, Alfred, and bring the child home with you."

"All right," he said bleakly, "I'll go. But I never did favor having her here in the first place."

"Mackerel's down to six cents again," he added, as he went out.

He drove to the town landing on the Pamet, thinking of the things he'd likely say to Meg on the way home. But there was no sign of any children at the river, and no raft in sight anywhere. Faintly troubled, he got into his dory, and rowed out to the *Thetis*. "You there," he called; "Mr. Smith."

Mr. Smith was in the cabin, where he had been busy getting his own supper. "Hello," he said in surprise. "What's up? "

"Haven't seen my niece and that little boy around here, have you? " asked Mr. Baghot.

"No," said Mr. Smith cheerfully. "Why? "

"They've gone to England," said Mr. Baghot. "On a raft."

Mr. Smith started to laugh. But when he saw that Mr. Baghot was not laughing too, he stopped,

and let out a low whistle. "Well," he said slowly, "Jeri did have a raft. He wanted to show it to me."

He stared out across the bight in the blue dusk. "They're probably down at the scow," he said. "I wouldn't worry."

"Maybe so," said Mr. Baghot.

"I'll go along with you," said Mr. Smith; "just in case."

The tide was still running out. As they walked up from the water's edge, Louisa opened the door, with the lamplight yellow behind her. "Is that you, Jeri?" she asked, trying to see out into the gloom.

"No ma'am," said Mr. Baghot. "It isn't." And Mr. Smith added sharply,

"Where is Jeri, Louisa?"

She put one hand to her heart, and stood staring at them. "I don't know," she said at last. "Is he not with you?"

"No ma'am," said Mr. Baghot. "Nor my niece, neither."

"Mr. Baghot thinks that they may have gone off on the raft together," said Mr. Smith gently.

"Oh," said Louisa. "The raft. So that was it."

She drew in her breath sharply. "But where are they, then?" she cried.

For a moment, no one spoke. Then Mr. Baghot drew a circle in the sand, with the toe of his boot.

"Tide's been going out," he said soberly. "Been out two three hours now."

He turned away. "By God," he said, "that's a fine something."

"I'm going home and call the coast guard."

"Yes," said Mr. Smith. "That's the best

thing." He looked down at the river, where the water was already low. "I can't get the *Thetis* out," he said. "But I can row. I'll row out into the bay, and look.

"Do you want to go with me, Louisa?"

"Of course," she answered breathlessly.

The two men went back together. Mr. Smith to get his own dinghy, and come down again with the current. Louisa caught up a blanket from the cabin, before she joined him. "They'll be cold," she said.

She sat in the stern, staring ahead of her, tense and silent, as the current swept them down through the rip and out into the bay. Once or twice she stood up, to see better. "Jeri," she called; and again, "Jeri." But there was no answer.

"The moon is coming up," she said. "That will help us."



But when the moon rose, it shone upon an empty bay; there was nothing to see but ripples of moonlight, and the black water. "It is no use," she said at last. "We had best go back and wait."

Anxiously and in silence they turned toward the Truro shore. "The tide will be coming in soon," he said. "As soon as there is water enough, I'll take the *Thetis* out. They can't have gone very far. The current will take them toward Provincetown; someone will find them. . . ."

"Yes," she said. "Of course." He did not know if she believed it or not, for her low voice told him nothing.

Back at the scow again, they sat together on the worn deck, peering through the night, searching the moonlight at the river mouth. "It's so calm," he said; "nothing can happen to them."

But all the time he was thinking, I ought to be doing something, not just sitting here. . . .

It was the old story: there was nothing he could do. How often must it be brought back to him? Others would go out to find the children, while he sat and waited — waited for the tide, waited for morning, waited for something to give him light and direction. . . . He could almost taste the bitterness of his thoughts.

Beside him, Louisa shivered in the fresh night air; or perhaps it was because of the tense way she was holding herself in. “Do you think they will find them?” she whispered.

“Yes,” he said stoutly. “The coast guard will find them.”

All was quiet around them. The moonlight lay cold and silver across the sand, the river moved at their feet. A fish jumped, making the silence seem



more silent still. For a long while he said nothing, feeling how far apart from him she held herself, how impossible it was to reach her with words. Her face was so white and still. . . . What comfort is there for any of us in pity? he thought. Only in love; the heart clings to its own, and the night is all around it.

Louisa was the first to break the silence. After a while, she said: "He wanted to bring other children back from across the sea." Her voice trembled, and she waited a moment to control it. "He is only a baby," she said. "I did not think he would really try. How brave. . . . But how he has frightened me."

So that was why they went, he thought: to bring other children back from across the sea. They had thought of it so simply, without any



doubts, and then they had gone about it directly. They had a raft, and they started out. It had seemed as easy as that to them.

But what of him? Had anything ever seemed easy to him? He, too, had wanted to be of use, to do great things in the world, to make himself felt in battles . . . but he had not been able to, he had never been able to. And so he had tried to run away. Now, in the quiet moonlight, he faced himself, and asked for an accounting. I have held back, he said to himself; I have been afraid. I have let myself grow too weary, studying the mistakes of others. I have tried to free myself from the world because it hurt me, and frightened me. But I have never been free; I have never known what freedom was like. For loneliness and freedom are not the same. To be free is to act, to give

one's heart. . . . How well Louisa knows it. "*But what I have is dear to me, because it is so little.*"

If only the tide would come, he thought wretchedly, if only the river would fill . . . then he would get the *Thetis* out . . .

But he could feel how frightened he was. Suppose he didn't find them. Suppose no one ever found them.

The quiet, helpless waiting . . .

They did not see Mr. Baghot at first, pulling toward them in his dory. His voice startled them, booming out across the water. "Coast guard's got them," he announced. "Bringing them over now. Said I'd go outside, and fetch them in. I'll leave the boy off here on the way back. You all right?"

The dory moved on toward the river mouth, through shine and shadow; and Mr. Baghot's voice

floated back to them against the wind. "Tide's coming in," he said.

"Coming in strong."

To Mr. Smith, it seemed as though the woman at his side suddenly crumbled. He heard her give a long, gasping cry, and her hands went to her face. All the bright courage, all the lonely pride, seemed to drain out of her, and she wept, silently, like a child. And at that moment, the tide that Mr. Smith had been waiting for, rose in his heart, full and strong, carrying him forward, carrying him away. He no longer felt old, or poor, or plain, or helpless; he only felt that he loved her, and that he was not afraid any more. He put his arm around her shoulder, and drew her head down against his breast. "Louisa," he said.

She did not answer. He took her hand, and carried it to his cheek; the clenched fingers opened

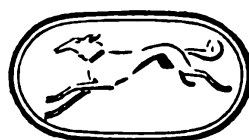
and lay across his face, soft as petals, and icy cold. He could feel his heart beating all through his body; and at the same time, his body seemed empty and hollow. "Look," he said.

For one last moment, he wondered if he was being wise. But the thought was swept away from him; and instead, he said to himself, I am part of it now.

"Hush," she said. She placed her fresh, sweet-smelling palm across his mouth. "Let me still cry a little," she whispered. "Afterwards."

He rocked her gently in his arms; smiling, he placed his lips against her hair, bright in the moonlight, wet with dew.

"Afterwards I have something to say to you, Louisa," he declared.



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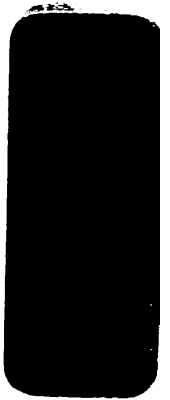
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